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Revivalism for the Working Class? American Methodist Evangelists in Late-Nineteenth-Century Urban Ontario

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The mob had “pushed and jammed the policemen; till it seemed that the living wedge, if it ever got an entrance at the door, must either rend the building or something,” reported the *Toronto Evening News*. The chaos that resulted when people attempted to gain access to a Sam Jones revival meeting was indicative of the impact that the evangelist and his co-worker Sam Small had on the Toronto community during their three-week revival campaign in October 1886. Approximately 180,000 people attended the meetings, a greater number than that of any other previous revival campaign in Canadian history. According to the *Globe’s* calculation, 75 per cent of the Toronto adult population experienced either a Jones or Small meeting in October 1886.¹

Visits by Jones and Small in 1887, however, did not generate the same degree of enthusiasm. To shed some light on their fall from grace as a revival team in Ontario within only a year of the October 1886 meetings, it may be helpful to explore whether the evangelists’ American brand of revivalism was suited for the Ontario urban working class. Were the popular revival meetings for the working class in the sense that they allowed such men and women to participate in a non-restrictive cultural event where spiritual sustenance was offered separate from the institutional and bourgeois structure of many city churches? In an assessment of the relationship between Methodist revival evangelicalism and the working class in Ontario, Jones’s and Small’s 1886 and 1887 meetings in Toronto may be particularly important given that these years witnessed a surge of popular, grass-roots revivalism and, equally important, a massive labour revolt caused mainly by wage cutting and other exploitative practices by industrialists.²

During this period, Alabama-born Jones and Tennessee-born Small attracted considerable attention in North America. Relying on earnest exhortations from the heart rather than learned theological sermons, Jones made the successful transition from rural Methodist preacher to urban revivalist, securing his place as a nationally known evangelist in the United States by 1885. After hearing Jones in 1884, an alcoholic and unchurched Sam Small experienced conversion and also began to preach the gospel. Later, when Jones was seeking assistance, he turned to the rookie Small as the best choice for a

co-worker. For the Toronto campaign of 1886, the Toronto *World* acknowledged the reputation of the Methodist evangelistic team from the South, predicting that with the combined efforts of Jones and Small “the Devil will be seized by both horns.”³

The three weeks of Toronto meetings in October 1886 seemed to ignite a spiritual powder keg: signs and expressions of popular religion were everywhere in the city of approximately 100,000 people. From the many comprehensive Toronto press reports, the meetings were viewed as popular, exciting, and chaotic. For example, total bedlam appeared to prevail at the final meeting as thousands were denied entrance to an overflowing rink that had far too many inside already. Within the building, some women and men were half-suffocated and a couple of women fainted before someone broke a window, allowing approximately two dozen women and men to escape for some much needed fresh air. As they staggered outside, there was a rush of about one hundred people seeking to gain access through the broken window. Given that 180,000 people attended the three weeks of meetings, it is not surprising that for the month of October no other conversational topic in Toronto matched that of the two Sams.⁴

Studies suggest that there was a rising number of unchurched Torontonians at this time, and concerned Methodists sought to reach such people through the medium of populist revivalism. With rapid population and industrial growth in the 1880s, there was also social upheaval and class tension as labour struggled for control of the workplace. As a mode of production, capitalism championed a labour system which, in the eyes of an increasing number of late-nineteenth-century labouring men and women, was unjust. In 1886 Massey Agricultural Implements Works acted on a threat to fire workers associated with unions, dismissing without cause several employees belonging to the Knights of Labor. Other underpaid and overworked Torontonians were pressured against any association with unions. Class struggle intensified. Indeed, in the years 1886 and 1887 there were no fewer than thirty-three Toronto strikes, all organized by workers who represented a wide variety of crafts and who were resisting the attempt by capitalists to impose new working conditions and payment schemes. In the midst of striking streetcar workers, craft workers, and labourers in Toronto, Jones and Small appeared to offer a revival message with anti-authoritarian overtones that harked back to simpler days. Male and female workers often looked backwards in time and embraced pre-industrial religious frameworks for meaning. Many Methodist clergymen and lay people had a deficient understanding of working-class opposition to industrial capitalism, but some Methodist ministers did recognize that workers who were indifferent to regular Sunday services might support revivalism.⁵

The revivalism promoted by Jones and Small shared a continuity and conceptual framework with older forms of popular and dissenting religious expression. The neutral revival setting, for instance, was connected with past non-conformist religious patterns. For the 1886 campaign, the main venue was Mutual Street Rink. Given the fact that

Canadian Methodist churches were becoming more ostentatious by the 1880s, the rink was an odd place for religious worship. There were no decorations, the boards overhead were unpainted, and the interior of the building had a bare appearance, features that together created a “barn-like general effect.” One “County Parson” commented that the meetings at the rink reminded him of the old-time Toronto revivals from the early 1850s. Yet, although only a minority of the local Methodists who volunteered their services as ushers or choir members likely represented the working class, the neutral setting of the Mutual Street Rink was less threatening and more egalitarian to the working-class unchurched than a “respectable” mainstream city church.⁶

The informal setting of the rink complemented the often unrefined and populist preaching by Jones. A recent study demonstrates that late-nineteenth-century Ontario male and female workers were attracted to the Salvation Army. As a revivalistic movement, the Salvation Army was criticized by other Protestant ministers for its vulgar and frivolous treatment of Christianity. In the British context, Eric Hobsbawm argues that the sectarian religion that appealed to the nineteenth-century working class was often “untheological, unintellectual and emotional.”⁷ These same characteristics were apparent in Jones’s brand of populist revivalism. To a Toronto audience, he proclaimed that Methodists “were born in a revival, and they could only live by revivals ... If they would show him a church that did not believe in revivals he would show them a church that looked like an abandoned graveyard.” His irreverent words seemed to be a protest against the clerical establishment. At one Toronto meeting, he preached: “What is a creed? It is nothing but the skin of truth set up and stuffed with sawdust and sand ... Jesus Christ never formulated a creed.” Jones maintained that “if my boy was called to preach I would not send him to a school of theology but to a school of manology.” Much of his initial success with the common masses probably resulted from this down-to-earth manner. As the *Evening Telegram* saw it, “Rev. Sam Jones is something distinct from the ordinary class of clergymen, and does not run in the conventional lines to which church-going people have been accustomed.” Jones admitted that his manner of speaking was directed to working people at the meetings. He did lessen his slang when the majority of his audience were women, but his populist message remained consistent.⁸ Using anecdote and illustration, Jones went to great lengths to fabricate the image that he was just a commoner who spoke the everyday vernacular and shared the tastes of ordinary working folk.

Critical commentary from certain quarters focused on Jones’s character. In the Anglican *Dominion Churchman*, an unidentified writer declared that “the quips and cranks of speech, the forced humour, the slangy phrases, the sneering, the personalities, which form the staple of the ‘Reverend’ Sam Jones’ discourses, smack strongly of the whisky saloon. Their delivery seems to require as fit accomplishments the clinking of glasses, the fumes of the dirtiest tobacco, and the incessant use of the spittoon.” Jones was also criticized in some daily newspapers for his slang and his vulgar anecdotes. One individual wrote in

disgust that Jones used such words as “damnation,” “hell,” “devil,” and other “epithets” in his revival message. A correspondent of the *Mail*, J.B. Worrell, warned that “parents who wish that their family should not be contaminated must place a ban on THE MAIL if it continues to report the ribaldry of the revival meeting.” Another writer to the *Mail*, Walter Dillon, protested against Jones’s vulgar and abominable language and declared that true and lasting religion consists of reverence rather than screaming and laughter. Similar views were expressed in editorials of the *Week*, a journal that catered to the refined and well educated.⁹

Yet, if there was often irreverence at Jones’s revivals, there were also periods of seriousness when listeners contemplated his candid comments on sin in society. The main theme in his preaching was that godliness and good behaviour were analogous: conversion was a resolution to “quit your meanness.” Condemnation of sin rather than theology preoccupied Jones. For him, it was vital that his audience be both aware of and ready to confront worldliness; Christian living was what was important.¹⁰ Concentrating on the behavioural aspects of Christianity and directing his words less at the heads of the people than at their consciences, Jones preached a revival message rife with denunciations of high-society life, Sabbath-breaking, drinking, dancing, gambling, swearing, and other social “sins.”

The evil of “money getting” was also a notable theme in a few of his Toronto sermons. One important message to Torontonians called on the rich to practise the compassionate use of wealth. Jones sought to shame Ontario Christians for their lack of compassion for people who suffered from having less; occasionally his message represented a direct protest against the rich and urban elite. A girl from a rich family, the preacher lamented at one Toronto meeting, could easily cry over Dickens’s Little Nell but she would go by a barefooted and starving little girl on the street without a second thought. Comparing kitchen labour to alleged Christian employers, Jones stated: “I am sorry for the home where there’s more religion in the kitchen than there is in the other part of the house.” At one Toronto meeting, he asked: “What is the difference between \$10,000 and \$1,000,000, as far as you are concerned?” The evangelist stated that, when a man gets drunk on whisky, his wife and neighbours will attempt to keep him straight. “But many a man, many a good Methodist, gets drunk on money and stays drunk for forty years and nobody says a word.” “The love of money,” Jones continued, “is the most subtle and powerful sin in the universe.”¹¹

At first glance, the Jones-Small critique of the pursuit of wealth, along with other aspects of their behaviour, seemed to identify them more closely with working-class culture than with status-quo notions of respectability. One issue that received attention in the Toronto press was the revivalists’ smoking of tobacco, a particular habit that offended the sensibilities of Methodist churchgoers. In an October 1886 letter to the *Globe*, Dr

Aylesworth of Collingwood questioned the wisdom of a Methodist who smoked. J.W. Cunningham, in the *Toronto World*, directed his attack on a man he identified as preaching a gospel of self-denial while yielding to a polluting tobacco that made him an affront to cultured people.¹² Others criticized both Jones and Small for choosing the Rossin House Hotel, where whisky was sold, for their residence during the revival. Such behaviour, scandalous in the eyes of some Torontonians, likely made Jones's meetings attractive and welcoming to others representing the working class. While the *British Whig* did not necessarily represent the voice of the proletariat, this Kingston newspaper admired the evangelist's "don't-care-a-continental style" which allowed him to denounce "the namby-pambyness of this church-going age."¹³

Jones's apparent fearlessness exuded a rough-edged masculinity. In her examination of gender, class, and religion in late-nineteenth-century small-town Ontario, Lynne Marks argues that many young working men were hostile to a Christianity which they perceived to be feminine in its theology and congregational composition.¹⁴ In this context, it is true that Jones, like other Victorian clergymen, attacked the rougher masculine world of street and tavern life, which he himself had pursued as a young man. Yet, at the same time, Jones's own manliness was never questioned. E.E. Sheppard, editor of the *Toronto News* and a labour candidate in the 1886 provincial election, wrote that "he by no means belongs to the half sex, to which parsons have sometimes been assigned on the plea that they are neither man nor woman. He is a man, with views and methods his own." Having a fighting streak in his bones, Jones declared that he would die in a pool of blood at his front door before worldliness entered his home. One of the books he wrote was titled *Rifle-Shots at the King's Enemies*. On the topic of a fiery hell, the preacher did not soften his message, unlike many other Victorian clergy. According to Jones, clergymen who did not preach hell were "mighty little fellows" incapable of having much influence over the masses.¹⁵ Few, if any, working-class men likely found fault with Jones's aggressive demeanour and his preaching of a muscular Protestantism.

Studies on late-nineteenth-century Canadian Protestantism indicate that church sermons catered far more to bourgeois assumptions than to working-class ideals.¹⁶ In this regard, it may be significant that few outside a group of Methodists offered their support for the Jones-Small revival meetings. A variety of denominations were cordially invited to assist the Toronto Methodists, and initially they accepted; however, when negative reports concerning Jones's character began to be voiced, they withdrew their sponsorship, thereby leaving the Toronto campaign solely in the hands of the Methodists. The main leadership behind the meetings consisted of two Toronto Methodist clergymen. The Reverend John Potts was the chairman, known for his ability to identify with the common people. The secretary was the Reverend Hugh Johnston, who admired and wrote a biography of John Macdonald, one of the few businessmen who

resisted all expressions of affluence.¹⁷ Methodist men of money and standing were mostly absent in the sponsoring of Jones and Small. Nor does the daily newspaper coverage give any indication that prominent businessmen and wealthy individuals of other Protestant denominations threw their support behind the Jones and Small campaign.

However, Jones and Small did receive considerable moral support from some who were known for their sympathy for labourers. Mayor William Howland, who was favoured by many Toronto workers, attended the campaign and was commended publicly by Jones as an exceptional mayor. Popular journalist and caricaturist J.W. Bengough, who often championed the working class, stated in 1886 that other preachers could learn from Jones's "success with the masses." Another supporter of the Jones-Small campaign was E.E. Sheppard of the *Toronto News*. Promoting the Knights of Labor and other labour-reform movements, the *News* more than once criticized classical political economy and the exploitation of labour between 1883 and 1887. Eager to defend the natural instincts of the populace, the *News*'s coverage of the revival meetings was positive. Sheppard, under the pseudonym of "Don," berated the "silver-plated, gilt-edged, the first-class-passenger-in-a-Pullman-car-church-member, who turns up his or her nose, and flops his or her ears in disgust at Jones and Small ... Let those whose piety is too blue-blooded and fine-haired to take part in a revival in a rink, beware lest it will be found that they are just a little proud for Heaven."¹⁸ Others used the discussion of revivals as a vehicle to criticize industrial capitalism. A *Globe* journalist supported Jones's efforts to point out the greed of the rich:

Now, the people are thinking a great deal these days about the shocking contrasts of fortune, and the dreadful, palpable miseries that accompany the strong march of civilization. Hence they are touched by the appeals of the Revivalists for active good will and good works. Preachers who don't know how to furnish variety might be somewhat surprised if they were seriously and often to inquire whether many of the comfortable people of their congregations really imagine they are guiltless, or that they can get to Heaven while they not only neglect the poor and weak, but take full advantage of the world's modern, detestable, and absolutely Pagan doctrine, that the rich and shrewd are entitled to seize and retain all they can grab from the needy through the system of fierce industrial competition.¹⁹

While the moral backing of this journalist and others does not prove that Jones had the approval of all labour leaders and most working-class men and women, such commentary does suggest that parts of his message were well received in some working-class circles.

Descriptive evidence from Toronto newspapers indicates that workers were attracted to the October 1886 meetings. According to a *Globe* report, the five thousand men who crowded into the rink for a men-only meeting were mostly mechanics, labourers, and clerks, with merely a sprinkling of merchants and lawyers present. In a letter to the *Toronto World*, John Fisk noted that a revival spirit had overtaken a large number of newspaper printers who represented one section of skilled labour. According to one Methodist pastor, the Jones-Small campaign had “called attention to so many outside of the church-going class on the great merits of religion and great interests of the soul and eternity.” This view was echoed in letters from non-clergy printed in the *Globe*.²⁰ The *Evening Telegram* reported that men in the taverns and workshops were discussing the revival campaign. In a harsh critique of Jones and Small, the *Week* admitted “that rhetoric from which the highly educated and refined turn with aversion may not be only palatable but profitable to minds of a different class.” Similarly, the *Toronto Mail* wrote that the revivalists’ language and methods were coarse and unattractive to more cultured minds but that “despite these radical perfections – in some degree, perhaps, because of them – they succeed in proclaiming the Gospel to multitudes who have hitherto refused to hear it.”²¹ Attendance at the Jones-Small October 1886 revival meetings was almost 200,000, and if support among the “respectable” was limited, it is reasonable to suggest that a fair number of ordinary working people did attend.

A number of studies indicate that individuals are drawn to religion during periods of economic and social strain. In nineteenth-century Britain, according to Eric Hobsbawm, “there was a marked parallelism between the movements of religious, social and political consciousness.” With regard to the Jones-Small revivals in late-nineteenth-century Toronto, there is no concrete data to prove such correlation between labour revolt and conversions. But the case for cause and effect is compelling, given that a notable number of conversions occurred in the middle of a period of massive labour revolt described as “the Great Upheaval of 1885–87.”²²

Ten days into the Toronto meetings of October 1886, approximately six hundred conversions had taken place. While far from precise, the best indicator for evaluating the impact of the campaign on church growth is membership records. Of twelve Methodist churches in Toronto, all but one had a rise of membership between June 1886 and June 1887. It may be significant that Sherbourne Methodist Church, located in a wealthy residential area and known as the “millionaire’s church,” added only two members, whereas Agnes Methodist Church, located in the slum-ridden St John’s Ward, added 152 members, the largest increase for a single Toronto Methodist church. Total membership figures for the Toronto district suggest that Jones and Small were instrumental in attracting new members into the churches. Whereas membership rose by 858 in the year before their meetings, it increased by 1,155 during the year of the campaign. From 1887 to 1888, membership grew by 996, down significantly compared to the increase achieved in

the year of the Jones-Small meetings.²³ Furthermore, these figures may underestimate the number of working-class conversions because many who attend religious services do not become official church members.

Could Toronto workers, victimized by wage cuts and the intensification of labour, have been encouraged by the Jones-Small brand of revivalism? Perhaps some Toronto working people, like their counterparts south of the border, yearned for “a living Christ moving, living, breathing and dominant in the hearts of the people ... scattering the table of the money changers in the temples ... going down in the poverty-stricken alleys of the robbed industrial slaves, and raising up its victims.”²⁴ A closer examination shows, however, that Jones’s and Small’s appeal to the working class was limited.

Despite their attacks on greed in society, Jones’s and Small’s notions of improvement failed to appreciate working-class grievance and need. As a sermon to “working girls” near the end of the 1886 campaign demonstrated, Small was aware of class struggle:

“Capital and labor are in antagonism. There are feuds and strikes, and contentions, and disturbances between the men who labor and the men who furnish the money and means for these enterprises. There is something abnormal, something radically wrong with the system on which business is done, or else there would be peace and harmony and community of interests between the people.”²⁵ But why was there struggle? “I do not assume to say it is the fault of the capitalist,” Small declared. Rather, poor “relations of capital and labor” were a result of the lack of Christian principles in society. According to Small, “social reformers” and “social agitators” were following a sinful and false path; his advice to those complaining of injustice in the workplace was to “cease their antagonism” and seek “righteousness.”²⁶

Like Small, Jones also refused to criticize the exploitation of labour. While Jones held that the church pulpit should not “dodge the question of capital and labor,” his own understanding of the plight of the proletariat was superficial. For example, like other Victorians, he focused on violent episodes and not on the antecedents that caused desperate actions by workers. “Let the hireling get the best wages he can or leave his work,” Jones argued, “but do not let him take a club and thrash the head of the man who takes his place. That is Anarchism.” American historian William McLoughlin argues that, while Jones was praised by contemporaries for referring to current events and for placing considerable emphasis on moral reform, his approach was simplistic and repressive. Within weeks after the Haymarket Riot in 1886, Jones stated, “When you come down to bed-rock, all this communism and Anarchism are based upon the liquor traffic. Where did the Chicago Anarchists hold their secret conclaves? In the back part of barrooms.” As Jones saw it, many economic problems would disappear with prohibition; all that

capitalism needed was an injection of Christian principles. He was critical of a capitalist's love of money, but he also believed that the worker who did not pursue whisky, idleness, and other immoral sins had the freedom to achieve success. Jones concentrated on the need for ethical and moral behaviour on the part of individuals. There was even an element of social control apparent in an *Evening Telegram* assessment of the Toronto revival campaign: "It is cheaper to maintain revivalists than to support hospitals, charities and jails, and the efforts of the one will help to keep down the number of those who find their way to the other."²⁷ Regardless of his distaste of greed in business practice, Jones's message appeared to reinforce the employers' view that the system of laissez-faire industrial capitalism was basically sound.

Although Jones spoke out against the love of money, he collected large sums during his Canadian visits. In a November 1886 letter to the editor of the *Irish Canadian*, S. Smith argued that "the whole motive and aim of all so-called revival movements is 'Money, Money,' nothing but money." Jones's and Small's acceptance of a cheque for \$2,500 from Toronto Methodists for the October 1886 campaign raised some eyebrows. The issue of moneymaking became more of an issue during Jones's visit to Toronto in December 1886 and to Toronto, Hamilton, London, Galt, and Kingston in 1887 when he delivered more paid lectures than free sermons. The admission to a lecture was as much as fifty cents (fifty times the price of a newspaper). While it was not uncommon for clergymen in Ontario to hold lectures to raise money for specific causes, it was unusual for an evangelist to charge audiences a fee. In 1887 Jones was forced to defend his lecture profits.²⁸

In addition to the charge of hypocrisy, Jones was also open to attack for failing to stress the traditional Protestant themes of conversion and hope in Christ. Revival pietism and emotionalism, which some historians claim attracted nineteenth-century working-class people, were missing in his lectures. Some of his favourite lectures were: "Character and Characters," "How to Win," and "The Ravages of Rum." The major thrust of these talks was that individuals must exercise initiative and self-control. In 1887 his lectures were paid entertainment, devoid of a salvation message, that promoted bourgeois ideals of respectability and progress. Even if some workers agreed with Jones's message of respectability, enterprise, and improvement, many probably found his words unappealing.

No empirical data exists to assess accurately Jones's working-class support, but there is evidence that Sam Small's September 1887 lectures in Toronto proved to be even more damaging than the actions of Jones. At a lecture meeting at Carlton Street Methodist Church chaired by businessman R. Irving Walker, Small presented his thoughts on "Society Thugs." Whisky sellers and ministers did not escape Small's barbs, but his commentary on newspaper editors and "labor agitators" was especially striking. Without clarifying his position, Small argued that much of the conflict and unrest among "the masses" was the fault of newspaper editors who not only failed to voice public opinion but pandered to the "low and debased." "Labor agitators" fared no better in his

estimation: "The state has no greater enemy than one of these nineteenth century labor agitators. I am not a worshipper of wealth; nor am I a sycophant to approve of these men who labor – with their mouth. Labor is honourable, and I always feel a sense of dignity in grasping the hand of the honest laborer. But the man who organizes a strike should be sent to the penitentiary, and the man who leads a boycott, the only fit jewellery is a ball and chain."²⁹ The applause from the large Methodist audience was frequent throughout the lecture. The following evening Small repeated his diatribe against labour organizations, singling out the Knights of Labor.³⁰ The friction caused by Small's lectures soon became apparent.

A *News* editorial labelled Small insincere because, on the evening he attacked labour organizations, he allegedly accepted an invitation to the Canadian Shorthand Writers' Association, a trade union whose members, the Toronto daily explained, "are well-to-do and wear good clothes, which makes a mighty sight of difference." The president of the association responded immediately, declaring that the provincial body, not the national one, had received Small. There was no confusion where the District Assembly of the Knights of Labor stood on the issue of Small. On 23 September, under the chairmanship of Master Workman Samuel McNab, the assembly challenged Small to a public debate, stating that Small's unfair and unjust attack on the Knights' platform "should not be allowed to pass unquestioned."³¹

There was much at stake for both labour and capital in this highly publicized confrontation. As Gregory Kealey and Bryan Palmer demonstrate, the Knights of Labor in Toronto – which played a key role in protecting labour from employers determined to cut wages and increase the pace of work – had undergone a decrease in membership and importance from its high mark in 1886. Capitalists themselves, concerned about the labour upsurge of the 1880s, frowned upon any legitimization of union activity. If one journalist's perspective mirrored that of many Torontonians, Small was the loser in the eyes of public opinion. In an editorial, the *Globe* reported that it had been supportive of Small in the past, given his work with Sam Jones. This had changed, however.

While it is the duty of journalists to refrain from criticism of pulpit utterances delivered with due regard for the sacred responsibilities of the preacher's position, it is no less the duty of journalists to denounce preachments tending to bring the pulpit into hatred and contempt. That disagreeable duty we have performed in Mr. Sam Small's case ... That clergymen are too neglectful of the miseries and strivings of the least comfortable classes is, unhappily, too much the belief of those classes already. Should they come to think that the comfortable Christian laity can approve of clergymen who denounce legitimate associations of workingmen as "Thugs," good-bye to the hope of bringing the masses to the churches.³²

The *News* also took the side of labour: "If Mr. Small refuses [debate with the Knights of Labor], the public will justly conclude that he has taken advantage of the immunity from reply afforded by the pulpit and the lecture hall to make assertions which he knows to be incapable of proof."³³ Thus, even if not all workers were offended by Small's attack on labour unions, at least two important Toronto dailies showed their displeasure. Since the successful promotion of urban revivalism depended, in large part, on newspaper coverage, Small's welcome among the Toronto press ran out. There was no longer any prospect of a major Jones and Small revival campaign in Toronto, with the much needed support of the daily newspapers and interest of the "masses."

Was a great opportunity missed by the evangelists to reach many workers embittered by the harsh reality of long work days, low wages, and an unhealthy and increasingly impersonal work environment? Studies by Lynne Marks and Doris O'Dell show that late-nineteenth-century working-class people in Ontario were interested in Christianity if it reflected their own way of life.³⁴ In 1886 some ingredients were present for working men and women to experience a collective solidarity at the Mutual Street Rink, especially when the revival message was interpreted on their own terms rather than on those of many regular churchgoers.

Workers' consciousness of a common class experience, however, likely did not arise at the October 1886 rink meetings. The meetings failed to embody the common experiences and Christian vision of many workers for four reasons. First, an emotionalism associated with the pietism of an older Methodist revivalism was in short supply. Jones and Small preached about the fiery hell that awaited wrongdoers – a form of religion that appealed to those who led oppressed lives. But Jones, especially, seldom spoke of Christ's atoning love. Unlike the Salvation Army, Jones rarely voiced emotional and rowdy appeals for listeners to experience spiritual salvation. Second, despite Jones's characterization of the wealthy as greedy and shallow, his message did not overturn bourgeois ideals of piety, respectability, and progress. Both Jones and Small endorsed the "success myth," which held that a Methodist who worked hard and practised self-control could achieve prosperity. Third, Jones and Small were not representatives of a labour-oriented sect. For example, they did not echo the voice of the Salvation Army, which, according to Lynne Marks, "provided a very trenchant, class-based critique of the mainstream churches." Jones and Small were basically mainstream Methodists, representing most Toronto Methodist churches. Finally, the revival had a cross-class appeal. The working-class people who attended the rink meetings were joined by many regular churchgoers, a number of whom probably maintained a bourgeois image by way of their attire and manners. There was no emphasis on earthy, emotional, soul-saving preaching; the rink meeting was not meant to offer workers a separate religious space.³⁵

The lectures by Jones and Small in 1887 further clarified that the American evangelists were not rejecting an ideology based on deference and dependence. Marguerite Van Die argues that, beginning in the 1850s, affluent Methodist membership played an essential role in securing money and enthusiasm for Methodist church expansion.³⁶ It is possible, however, that with the encroachment of a more oppressive type of industrial capitalism, the close relationship between Methodist churches and wealthy capitalists may have deterred many working-class men and women from becoming involved with church life. Living in a society undergoing rapid industrialization, late-nineteenth-century Ontario Methodists were increasingly confronted with issues relating to the rich and poor. Jesus and others in the New Testament warned people to be on guard against greed and the accumulation of worldly possessions. A spiritual message and social critique was pronounced by various Old Testament prophets. Amos spoke of the actions of people who “sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed.”³⁷ Jones and Small did not necessarily have to preach a form of Christian socialism to attract the working class. Nor did their revival message need to include persistent diatribes against industrial capitalism. But in a period of intense labour protest they did have to show a greater sensitivity to working-class grievance.

The Jones and Small revival campaign occurred in an era when Ontario workers expressed their support of a practical Christianity that recognized both spiritual and material needs. In an early November 1886 letter to the *Globe*, a “Practical Christian” lamented that denominations were devoted to improving church buildings while one blacksmith, struck down with illness, received no assistance in feeding his starving family. Similarly, a *Globe* article suggested that pew rents and a “social club” atmosphere for the well dressed and wealthy deterred many workers from attending churches. A greater deterrent, however, was that too many ministers failed to preach a gospel message. The newspaper declared that, owing to the clergy’s emphasis on “the necessity of being submissive under the oppression of the rich, and contented with the miserable pittance sometimes called wages ... not a few have felt called upon to protest that all such talk [at church services] is no good news to them, and that if this be all that is to be said they will have none of it.” The *Globe* continued: “It is possible, we may add, that wittingly or unwittingly, the old Gospel has ceased to be preached, and that therefore many find in church services no message for their hearts, and no help to their struggle in life in the lifeless essays that pass too frequently for pulpit oratory.”³⁸

Days before the arrival of Jones and Small, one working man wrote that it was not disbelief in Christianity that discouraged working-class people from attending church. Rather, many workers were pained to see employers at church who did not treat their employees justly. The man knew of one employer who ignored his employees at church, and of a manufacturer and Bible teacher at another church who cheated employees out of

fair wages. "What can be thought of the Christianity of such men," the worker wondered, "and they are the ones that the preachers take particular pains to look after so as to have fine church buildings and high salaries." In the same newspaper issue, another commentator wrote: Will today's ministers "by word and deed show to the workingmen that the good old gospel has not lost its power, but it is still the same? May the day be near when we shall have, instead of empty charity, a practical Christianity."³⁹

American Methodist evangelists Sam Jones and Sam Small attracted a significant number of Ontario working men and women to their 1886 rink meetings. Yet Sam Jones's lack of biblical preaching, his focus on money-making lectures, and Sam Small's attacks on trade unions nullified the evangelists' hopes of having another revival campaign in Ontario matching the popularity of the 1886 Toronto meetings. While the appeal of popular Christianity in Ontario remained powerful among workers, the experience of Jones and Small indicated that the future of Methodism among the working class was not promising. A few years after the Jones and Small Ontario visits, the Methodist clergyman James Henderson, lamenting the exodus of Methodists to the Salvation Army, questioned whether wealthy church people cared about "the pinched features and impoverished homes of the proletariat."⁴⁰ If Methodist revivalism was successfully to attract a greater number of working-class people back into the churches, evangelists and local clergymen could not ignore the particular spiritual and practical needs of those struggling to survive in a harsh urban-industrial climate.

- 1 "The Two Sams," Toronto *Evening News*, 27 October 1886. The *Globe*, 28 October 1886, based its calculation on the fact that every one of the twenty evening services at the 4,000 seat rink was filled to overflowing (80,000) and that fifty other afternoon and evening meetings at the rink and the Metropolitan Church attracted an average of over 2,000 people (100,000). The total figure of 180,000, the *Globe* acknowledged, "includes many who attended several meetings, but cannot include any who attended all, inasmuch as two meetings were in progress simultaneously. At the lowest estimate, therefore, it is probable that fully three-fourths of the adult population of Toronto have listened to one or both of the Sams." The late-nineteenth-century Canadian commentator C.S. Clark wrote that Jones's drawing cards were his "vulgarity," "slangy style of oratory," and "continental notoriety." See *Of Toronto the Good, Social Study: The Queen City of Canada as It is* (Montreal: Toronto Publishing, 1898), 172.
- 2 With the exception of a few recent studies, the place of evangelicalism in working-class culture has received meagre attention by Canadian historians. See Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure, and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); Doris O'Dell, "The Class Character of Church Participation in Late Nineteenth-Century Belleville, Ontario" (PHD thesis, Queen's University, 1990); Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, "'The Labouring People of the Common Man Is Filled with Religious Fervour': The Labouring People of Winnipeg and the Persistence of Revivalism, 1914-1925," paper delivered to Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience Conference, Queen's University, 10-14 May 1995; and Norman Knowles, "Christ in the Crownest: Religion and the Working Class on the Western Canadian Coal Mining Frontier," paper presented to the BC Studies Conference, Malaspina University

- College, May 1997. The late-nineteenth-century period witnessed numerous revivals in urban Canada, a fact that encouraged S.D. Clark to label this era "The Great Revival of the City" in *Church and Sect in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1948), ch. 8. On class struggle in this period, see Gregory Kealey, *Workers and Canadian History* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 333.
- 3 Laura Jones, *The Life and Sayings of Sam Jones* (Atlanta: Franklin-Turner, 1907). The *Globe* of 15 October 1886 provides, by far, the best Canadian newspaper account of Small's testimony on his journey from alcoholic to evangelist. See also Sam Jones, *Sam Jones and Sam Small in Toronto: A Compilation of the Best Sermons Preached by Rev. Sam Jones and Rev. Sam Small at the Great Revival in Toronto, as Reported in the Columns of the Globe, Together with Short Sketches of Their Lives* (Toronto: Rose Publishing, 1886), 125. The *Toronto World*, 12 October 1886, also reported that the two Sams promised "to do some heavy execution against the powers and patronage of Satan."
 - 4 "The Two Sams." It was reported that "the tide of religious enthusiasm and zeal that has for nearly three weeks been steadily rising in the tabernacle on Mutual street and the Metropolitan church, last night culminated in a tidal wave of excitement which surged for hours around the gifted evangelists, who have been almost idolized by a large number of their hearers." According to the *Globe*, 25 October 1886, Jones and Small were the centre of attention throughout Toronto.
 - 5 David Marshall, for example, argues that a large number of city folk had migrated from rural society; the "rootless urban masses" were separated from the local church and also were diverted from church fellowship by a variety of leisure activities and consumer items." See Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief, 1850–1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 73. For a full account of class tension during this period, see Gregory Kealey and Bryan D. Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be: The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880–1900* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1987), 114–26, and Gregory Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867–1892* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 293, 321–2. Drawing on the work of British historian Eric Hobsbawm, Herbert Gutman makes the point about workers looking back into the past in *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York: Random House, 1976), 86. Similar arguments are made in Deborah Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985). One of the few Methodist clergymen who publicly spoke out against labour injustice in this era was the Reverend James Henderson. Known for his bold preaching on social issues, Henderson pointed out that the churches had millionaires who cared little about the working class. For more on Henderson, see Salem Goldworth Bland, *James Henderson, D.D.* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1926), especially his sermon entitled "Christian Socialism," 324–32. Methodism's negative response to labour strikes and anti-poverty movements is noted in Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914–28* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 8.
 - 6 For more commentary on the informal atmosphere of the rink, see the *Evening News*, 8 October 1886, and County Parson, "An Old-Time Revival," *Globe*, 26 October 1886. The *Canadian Methodist Magazine*, September 1886, acknowledged that "the idea is sometimes entertained among the poor that they are not as welcome in our elegant modern churches as they were in the quaint, old-fashioned, homely meetings of an earlier day." For more on the increasingly bourgeois character of Methodism, see William Magney, "The Methodist Church and the National Gospel, 1884–1914," *Bulletin*, no. 20 (1968), 9–26; Neil Semple, *The Lord's Dominion: The History of Canadian Methodism* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's

- University Press, 1996), 339–40; and Clark, *Church and Sect in Canada*, 393–6.
- 7 Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, 164. E.J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1963), 132.
 - 8 “Rev. Sam P. Jones,” *Mail*, 8, 11 October 1886; *Globe*, 11 October 1886; *Evening Telegram*, 9 October 1886; “Five Thousand Men,” *Globe*, 11 October 1886. On Jones’s adjustment of language, see *Globe*, 12 October 1886. The issue of gender in major revival campaigns in Canada has not yet been explored. Some meetings were designated for women only, others for men only. Given the lack of available data, an analysis of most meetings, composed of both males and females, presents difficulties.
 - 9 “Religion in the Gutter,” *Dominion Churchman*, 21 October 1886; “Sam Jones and Swearing,” *Mail*, 20 October 1886; J.B. Worrell, “A Protest against Rev. Sam Jones,” *ibid.*, 13 October 1886. In another letter to the *Mail*, 16 October, Worrell reiterated that Jones’s language was of the bar room and saloon. See also Walter Dillon, “Rev. Sam Jones,” *ibid.*, 18 October 1886, and the *Week*, 21 October, 4 November 1886.
 - 10 Kathleen Minnix, *Laughter in the Amen Corner: The Life of Evangelist Sam Jones* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 83. Unfortunately, Minnix’s fine study does not discuss Jones’s Canadian visits.
 - 11 *Mail*, 11 October 1886; *Globe*, 12 October 1886; *Evening Telegram*, 8 October 1886.
 - 12 Dr Ayleworth, “Sam Small and Smoking,” *Globe*, 18 October 1886; *World*, 27 October 1886. In *ibid.*, 26 October, a *World* reporter asked Jones if he smoked. Jones allegedly replied: “As to my habits ... it is no more the public’s business than the color of my socks.”
 - 13 *Evening News*, 28 October 1886, defended the evangelists’ stay at the Rossin House. See also *British Whig*, 17 March 1887.
 - 14 Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, 162.
 - 15 For more commentary by Sheppard, see *Evening News*, 28 October 1886; *Globe*, 20 October 1886; “The Outside Sinners,” *ibid.*, 13 October 1886. On Victorians and the preaching of hell, see Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith*, 41–8.
 - 16 Brian J. Fraser, *The Social Uplifters: Presbyterian Progressives and the Social Gospel in Canada, 1875–1915* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1988); Allen, *The Social Passion*.
 - 17 *Globe*, 6 October 1886, provided no specific information on why other denominational leaders did not support the campaign. For more on Potts and Johnston, see United Church Archives, John Potts Biographical File, and Hugh Johnston Papers, Correspondence, 1878–1893, box 1, file 2. It was Pott’s suggestion that Jones publish a volume of his Toronto revival sermons in remembrance of the city’s “wonderful awakening” in 1886. Sam Jones, *Living Words; or, Sam Jones’ Own Book, Containing Sermons and Sayings of Sam P. Jones and Sam Small in Toronto* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1886).
 - 18 On Jones and Howland, see *Globe*, 28 October 1886, and J.W. Bengough, *Grip*, 30 October 1886. Ramsay Cook has argued that Bengough was a Protestant moral reformer who was open to various religious prescriptions for society’s ills. See *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 123–51. On E.E. Sheppard, see *Evening News*, 28 October 1886, and Russel Hann, “Brainworkers and the Knights of Labor: E.E. Sheppard, Phillips Thompson, and the Toronto News, 1883–1887,” in Gregory S. Kealey and Peter Warrion, eds., *Essays in Canadian Working Class History* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1976), 35–57.
 - 19 *Globe*, 16 October 1886.
 - 20 *Ibid.*, 11 October 1886; “Salvation for the Typos,” *World*, 14 October 1886; *Globe*, 25 October 1886; “Opinions from the Street,” *ibid.*, 28 October 1886. Some merchants

- complained that the campaign had a negative impact on business because people attended the meetings instead of shopping.
- 21 *Evening Telegram*, 13 October 1886; *Week*, 4 November 1886. The *Evangelical Churchman*, 14 and 21 October 1886, made a similar point. See also *Mail*, 16 October 1886.
 - 22 In American historiography, William McLoughlin, in *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York: Ronald Press, 1959) and *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607–1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), argues that revivals were responses to social unrest. The influence of McLoughlin’s work can be seen in studies such as Darrel M. Robertson, *The Chicago Revival, 1876: Society and Revivalism in a Nineteenth-Century City* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), and Douglas W. Frank, *Less Than Conquerors: How Evangelicals Entered the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986). In contrast, Eric Hobsbawm claims that revivals appealed especially to the working class, including people representing “the lower depths of wretchedness.” See *Primitive Rebels*, 129–30. For more on the “Great Upheaval of 1885–1887,” see Kealey, *Workers and Canadian History*, 333.
 - 23 On the number of revival conversions, see *Globe*, 20 October 1886. For membership rolls, see United Church Archives, Methodist Minutes, 1884–88. On Toronto, see Peter Goheen, *Victorian Toronto, 1850 to 1900: Pattern and Process of Growth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); *The Rise of Toronto, 1850–1890* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1947); J.M.S. Careless, *Toronto to 1918: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1984). Working-class enclaves were often near the factories – at the eastern end of the harbour near the Don Channel, and close to the railway lines in the southwest. Old Macaulay town in St John’s Ward had slum conditions.
 - 24 Quoted in Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society*, 93.
 - 25 “Sam Small to Working Girls,” *Globe*, 25 October 1886. According to the *Globe*, “it was the largest gathering of women ever held in the city.”
 - 26 *Ibid.*
 - 27 *Globe*, 15 October 1886; McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, 311–14; *Evening Telegram*, 19 October 1886.
 - 28 *Irish Canadian*, 4 November 1886. On Jones and Small receiving \$2,500, see *World*, 28 October 1886. For examples of paid lectures by clergymen, see “Scrapbook – Lecture Broad-sides,” Richmond Hill Public Library, Local History Room, Richmond Hill, Ontario. Jones defended himself in the *Hamilton Daily Spectator*, 9 March 1887, and also at his London lectures (*London Advertiser*, 11 March 1887). The *Montreal Daily Star*, 15 March 1887, and the *British Whig*, 17 March 1887, defended his admission fees.
 - 29 *Evening News*, 21 September 1887.
 - 30 *Ibid.*; *Globe*, 21 September, and *World*, 21 September. See also *Evening News*, 22 September 1887.
 - 31 *Evening News*, 23, 24 September 1887; “Sam Small’s Attack,” *World*, 24 September 1887.
 - 32 Kealey and Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be*, passim; “The Churches and the Masses,” *Globe*, 30 September 1887.
 - 33 *News*, 26 September 1887.
 - 34 Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*; O’Dell, “The Class Character of Church Participation.”
 - 35 For a brief but helpful discussion of workers’ class consciousness, see Bryan D. Palmer, *The Character of Class Struggle: Essays in Canadian Working-Class History, 1850–1985* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), 10. Especially helpful in understanding the Salvation Army and working-class religion is Lynne Marks, “The Knights of Labor and the Salvation Army: Religion and Working-Class Culture in Ontario, 1882–1890,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 28 (fall 1991), 89–127. At one Jones meeting, the Reverend John Potts announced

that “a great many laboring men” sought to hear Jones but by the time “they got cleaned up and had supper” the rink was full to capacity (*Globe*, 25 October 1886). Much more work needs to be done on the class composition of revival-goers. In the case of an 1893 revival at Thorald, Ontario, Lynne Marks, in *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, 192, argues that converts came from all classes: “In fact, working-class people predominated – the proportion of working-class converts was far higher than that of middle-class converts.”

- 36 Marguerite Van Die, “A March of Victory and Triumph in Praise of ‘The Beauty of Holiness’: Laity and the Evangelical Impulse in Canadian Methodism, 1800–1884,” in George Rawlyk, ed., *The Evangelical Impulse: Aspects of Canadian Evangelicalism* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), 81–7.
- 37 See, for example, Luke 12:15; Matthew 19: 21, 24; Acts 2:44, 45; Amos 2:6–7.
- 38 “Letters to the Editor,” *Globe*, 9 November 1886; “Church Going and Working-Men,” *ibid.*, 25 September 1886.
- 39 “Workingmen and Church-going,” *Globe*, 2 October 1886. Such comments focus on the plight of male workers but female workers also faced many difficulties at the workplace.
- 40 Bland, *James Henderson*, 327–31. Henderson stated: “We have millionaires in our Churches, but what do they care for the most part for the hungry and unwashed multitudes ...They [people in the future] will look on the pinched features and impoverished homes of the proletariat of to-day as we look on the brutal serf who was worse off than his master’s hounds.”