

LICENSING ACT AMENDMENT BILL NO. 1
(COMMITTEE STAGE)
13 December 1921

Edith Cowan spoke strongly in support of the Bill which attempted to more effectively control liquor sales. Such legislation was regarded as more acceptable and pragmatic than prohibition.

Mrs COWAN: (West Perth) [11.37]: I rise to support the second reading of the Bill, because I was returned to the House to support local option by a bare majority vote and also to do my utmost to help in any way to eliminate by degrees the evils of this traffic from our midst. I am one of those who believe that straight-out prohibition is an impossibility here at the present time, and that we have to go gradually, step by step, and the public must go with us.

Hon W.C. Angwin: It must be done throughout Australia. You cannot do it in this State alone.

Mrs. COWAN: The hon. member may be right. Perhaps members do not think sufficiently of the fact that alcohol is a racial poison and that it is very important that they should think deeply on this point when dealing with the subject, because of the effect it must have on the race. I remember what an illumination it was to me the first time I heard the subject discussed from that point of view. It was by Dr Saleeby in London in 1913. I never realised before that there were three racial poisons that could absolutely poison the very germ that laid the foundation of life of the coming child. When we remember this, we should think very seriously, and deliberate well on what we are doing when we encourage a traffic which we know is so unsatisfactory and deadly in its results to the race.

Mr Lambert: What are the other two poisons?

Mrs COWAN: White lead and syphilis. If this traffic were so remarkably good as some members would have us believe, is it not strange that licensees nearly always endeavour to secure employees who are abstainers? Again, many publicans do not drink at all because they realise the evils arising from liquor, the hold it might get upon them, and the detriment it would be to their business and to their surroundings generally. That is one of the points which always appeals strongly to thinking people. I have heard great fault found with the Premier tonight. I think, with the pressure that has been brought to bear upon him from both sides, he has done even better than we might have expected, although I do not agree with everything that is contained in the Bill. He is right in regard to his taxation proposals, and will get any support I can give him in that respect. If we can afford to spend enormous amounts

yearly in drink, and only a moderate amount on education, there is something wrong with our point of view, and we are not particularly balanced people as to what is best for the community. Even with this tax we are not going to pay the cost of everything that drink brings upon the State. We have only to look at the cost to the community for the upkeep of our gaols and our hospitals. Our gaols are full of people who have got there, many of them, as a result of drink. Our police have to be paid and kept largely because of the numbers of people who drink; as have also our judges and our stipendiary magistrates. Our Old Men's Home and our asylums are all affected. Venereal disease is brought about probably more as a result of people drinking than anything £82,000 a year on State children, very largely because of the drinking habits of their parents. If we do into the proportions we should probably be amazed, just as we are amazed at the results of drink as we see them in the Children's Court.

Hon P. Collier: Venereal disease has swept over countries where the people have been non-drinkers.

Mrs COWAN: Quite so, and that always will be. The greater proportion of the people is affected as a consequence of drink than of anything else. Then we have our orphanages full mainly for the same reason. One of the saddest things is to see the results of our wine shops. I support every word the member for Leederville (Capt. Carter) said on that subject. It is heartbreaking to see what is going on, and realise what these wine shops are doing. It is all very well to talk about making wine the drink of the people. We cannot do that unless we break it down very considerably. I have spent a great deal of time in continental countries and know something about what people get there in the way of wine. They certainly do not get anything like Australian wine. The wine they do get would in this country be regarded as a temperance beverage.

Hon P. Collier: Wine-drinking countries in Europe are the most sober of the countries.

Mrs COWAN: Because the wine they drink there would come under the heading of a temperance drink if it were used in Australia. People can, of course, get strong drink if they want it. The wine that is usually drunk of the continent is practically non-alcoholic. It is rather sour and has no strength in it, and would not affect a man's brain in the least.

Mr Lambert: It would give you a pain.

Mrs COWAN: If hotels are the wonderful places they are said to be, and are such a boon to the community, why is it that screens are needed across the bar doors? It has always puzzled me, as a woman, why, if people want a harmless glass of liquor, they have to go behind a screen to drink it. I have only once been in a public bar, and that was during the war. There were some young soldiers in the bar, and some of us went in and persuaded them to go quietly back to Blackboy and get away from any further temptation. I can see no objection to a person going into a bar, if he desires to do so, but cannot understand the reason for the screen.

Mr Teesdale: It is to keep the dust out.

Mrs COWAN: There should be no need for a screen for that purpose. I should like to have seen the Bill provide for the taking of a poll on election day. If we can save the country £3,577 on the next occasion we ought to do so. It may not sound a very startling sum when we realise the amount of the deficit, but it ought to be possible to save that amount. I understand that was the cost of the last poll. I am in favour of the registration of bar attendants, but regret that nothing has been embodied in the Bill to abolish barmaids. I have the greatest respect for many women who are married well, and whom one meets in ordinary society all the world over, but who have been barmaids. I have nothing to say against them. It is not a suitable employment for women. By making the bar attractive by the employment of barmaids our sons are the more likely to be tempted and led astray. I should like to see men do their own dirty work, if they must have hotels and bars, and run the bars themselves. Clause 2 of the Bill requires amendment and the word "alcohol drink" defined. As it is, an extraordinary position may arise if no better definition is put in than at present exists. I cannot say I think the clause dealing with temporary licenses is a good one. I am opposed to the three-fifths majority. My electors were strongly in favour of the bare majority vote. I do not think compensation should be given. Ten years' notice was given, and everyone knew that there was this period in which to get ready for the altered conditions. If the House decides by a majority to give compensation, it should certainly be made to apply to the reduction houses as well as the others. I do not see why it should be made to apply to any in the circumstances. People who have been referred to as bona fide travellers have been a curse, and I am glad the Premier is going to do his best to abolish the type. I hope the House will assist him in that direction. The general public have given evidence of their desire to lessen the evil. Even though they were in the minority, I am going to argue on the lines of the member for Pilbara (Mr Underwood). He said that the minority who wanted a drink should be considered more than the majority who did not. I claim that the minority of those who voted for non-license deserve as much consideration as the majority who voted for reduction. The thing cuts both ways. We had better use our logic and realise that. It was stated that we had no right to have reduction at all. I am sorry that this has not been provided for in the Bill. We should have the right to vote reduction as well as no license. I do not agree that we should necessarily copy the State of Victoria. If we have 500 hotels for a population of 330,000 people, we are altogether out of proportion. In Victoria there is a population of one and a half million.

The Premier: The proportion in the two States is about the same.

Mrs COWAN: We have more hotels than we want, and Victoria also must have more than she wants. The member for Pilbara spoke of non-productiveness in many directions, and that we should lost by it. We lose far more from the effect of alcohol on the people who have become hopeless and helpless, and whom have to keep out of our own pockets because they are unable to contribute to any taxation themselves. I agree that to take a vote of the whole State might be the best means of settling the question. It would probably give us a very good idea of what the whole community want. But I do not think that we shall be permitted to do this, either by the licensed victuallers or by anyone else. Possibly "no license" would be carried throughout the State. Therefore that means of finding out has been carefully avoided. As regards clubs, I certainly think they should be on the same footing as hotels. The trading hours I would like to see made from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Why

should a public house have a right to longer hours of trading than ordinary business places have? Throughout the rest of the Commonwealth the hours are now from nine to six.

Mr Johnson: The hours are from six to six in some States.

Mrs COWAN: I see no reason why drink should be sold after hours. It would be a good idea if the sale of drink in hotels were prohibited after 6 p.m., and if then they were only permitted to supply meals. I know that travelling to Moora and elsewhere with my husband I found that after 4 p.m., the only thing obtainable in hotels was liquor. Nothing to eat was obtainable, except it was a biscuit. These experiences refer to some years back; but if that condition of affairs still exists, it should be remedied. One should be able to get a dinner at an hotel in the evening.

Mr Simons: The hours of hotels should be from nine to six, seeing that the sale of drink is a business transaction, and especially seeing that the traffic is one that is detrimental to the community, and not beneficial. Publicans themselves, in fact all people connected with the trade, admit it. On the other hand, I acknowledge that temperance people are not doing what they should in the way of providing substitutes for liquor. As to the remark of the member for Nelson (Mr J H Smith) about taking wine for one's stomach's sake, the text simply shows that alcoholic liquor should be taken medicinally, and not as a beverage. I support the second reading, believing that with various amendments the Bill may be made a satisfactory measure.