

# ***The Drink Problem***

— IN THE —

## ***Great War***

Leaflet Number 1

**THE CANADIAN TEMPERANCE FEDERATION**  
**30 BLOOR ST. W.      TORONTO**

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## THE GREAT WAR



"No other single event in the course of the last hundred years has so profoundly altered the status of a social problem as the European War has altered that of the Drink Question. The reform of the common sale and use of alcohol then sprang at once from the list of things desirable into the very forefront of reforms of imperative importance." "The public attention was concentrated as never before upon any habit or arrangement that was seen to impair national efficiency." (From the Report of The Fifteenth International Congress Against Alcoholism.)

On the outbreak of the war the government of Great Britain was called upon to face the liquor problem which suddenly took on very serious importance. Extraordinary powers were given to military and naval officers over sale of liquor near the location of their forces. Taxation was rapidly increased on liquors, the closing hour was set earlier, and sundry other measures were taken without very much effect on the general situation or the particular evils which were chargeable to liquor. These evils were apparent in a variety of directions.



## RECRUITS INJURED

Sir Edward Henry, Chief Commissioner of Police, wrote:

"It is stated that many of the reservists and young soldiers who come from the country, where the hours of closing are earlier, are lavishly treated to drink by the civilians, of which the result has been a quite disproportionate amount of drunkenness among the men of the reserve battalions."

The Commissioner called attention to another phase of this matter. "As your Society is doubtless aware, I continue to receive numerous reports regarding the incalculable harm resulting from women resorting to public-houses during the forenoon. The correctness of these representations I have verified by police observation. Most members of your Society will be prepared to admit that for women to commence drinking in the early part of the day must unfit them for their home duties and their work, and will, I am sure, be anxious at a time of crisis like this to do what may be in their power to remedy so grievous an evil."

## THE TIMES SPEAKS OUT

The **Times** in December, 1914, reported: "The week-end is the danger time. The drinking evil is then at its worst." "A Bacchic welcome was given to the regulation which secures that women shall not be served with

drink before 11.30 a.m. The 11.30 queue of women is now a daily scene. One totally unexpected result of the order is that children coming home from morning school often find no dinner ready for them. A further restriction until 2 p.m. is accordingly being demanded in the interests of the little ones, who alone impart brightness and gaiety to these sordid almost inhuman courts and alleys."

## INDUSTRY IMPAIRED

"As the autumn and winter months passed by it soon became evident that the prevalent consumption of intoxicants was making very strongly against the industrial efficiency of the nation. At a time when it was absolutely essential that our workers put forth, unimpeded, their utmost endeavours in order to provide the army and navy with adequate and abounding munitions of war, it was increasingly found that both the manufacture and transport of munitions was being most seriously hindered by the loss of time and by the incapacity through drink of a very important and by no means numerically insignificant minority of works. On this account, then, an important agitation sprang up to urge the Government to impose really drastic restrictions upon drinking. The movement did not emanate from the organized Temperance forces of the country, nor was it confined by party limitations. The **Times**, the **Spectator**, the **Manchester Guardian**, **Truth**,



and other influential papers all wrote strongly on the matter. The paragraph from **Truth** of February 10th was as follows:—

'Many of the godless employers, who would as soon subscribe to the German War Loan as they would to a Band of Hope, are convinced that the Government will have to close public-houses in the armaments areas if they want the output to increase. If the men like to drink away their money, that is no affair of the State's; but they are drinking away their time and energy, which is a very different matter when the acceleration of contracts is of vital consequence. If I had heard this view expressed by Temperance fanatics I should have dismissed it for an ex parte attempt to make the nation sober by martial law. But when Glasgow iron-masters talk like this, and order water instead of whisky with their mutton, one must take the proposal seriously.'"

### **MORE DANGEROUS THAN GERMANS**

The Government was slow to act but in February, 1915, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, speaking at Bangor, said: "I hear of workmen in armaments works who refuse to work a full week's work for the nation's need. What is the reason. They are a minority. The vast majority belong to a class we can depend upon. The others are a minority. But, you must remember a small minority of workmen can throw a whole

works out of gear. What is the reason? Sometimes it is one thing, sometimes it is another, but let us be perfectly candid. It is mostly the lure of the drink. They refuse to work full time, and when they return their strength and efficiency are impaired by the way in which they have spent their leisure. **Drink is doing us more damage in the war than all the German submarines put together."**

"On March 29th the great private ship-building firms, whose work for the Government was being sorely crippled by the excessive drinking of the drinking minority of their men, approached Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. McKinnon Wood in an influential deputation, which was representative of the leading firms in the country, and asked for total prohibition of the Liquor Traffic . . ." In replying to the deputation Lloyd George alluded to the remark of Mr. Henderson in introducing the deputation to the effect that there were no teetotallers in the group. He then continued:

### **THE GREATEST ENEMY**

"Having gone into this matter a great deal more closely during the last few weeks, I must say that **I have a growing conviction based on accumulating evidence that nothing but root and branch methods will be of the slightest avail in dealing with this evil.** (hear, hear.) I believe that to be the general



feeling. The feeling is that if we are to settle German militarism, we must first of all settle with the drink. (hear, hear.)

**"We are fighting Germany, Austria, and drink, and, as far as I can see, the greatest of these deadly foes is drink.** (hear, hear.) Success in the war is now purely a question of munitions. I say that, not only on my own authority, but on the authority of our great general, Sir John French. He has made it quite clear what his conviction is on the subject. I think I can venture to say that that is also the conviction of the Secretary of State for War, and it is also the conviction of all those who know anything about the military problem, that in order to win all we require is an increase, an enormous increase, in the shells, rifles, and all the other munitions and equipment which are necessary to carry through a great war."

### **THE KING'S LEADERSHIP**

"The gravity of the situation was emphasized in a unique way by the action of H.M. the King. On March 30th His Majesty sent to Mr. Lloyd George, through Lord Stamfordham, a message that:

'The King thanks you for so promptly letting him have a full report of the proceedings at yesterday's meeting of the Deputation of Employers.

'His Majesty has read it with interest, but also with deepest concern. He feels that nothing but the most vigorous measures will successfully cope with the grave situation now existing in our Armament Factories. We have before us the statements, not merely of the employers, but of the Admiralty and War Office officials responsible for the supply of munitions of war, for the transport of troops, their food and ammunition. From this evidence it is without doubt largely due to drink that we are unable to secure the output of war material indispensable to meet the requirements of our Army in the field, and that there has been such serious delay in the conveyance of the necessary reinforcements and supplies to aid our gallant troops at the front.

'The continuance of such a state of things must inevitably result in the prolongation of the horrors and burdens of this terrible war.

'I am to add that if it be deemed advisable the King will be prepared to set the example by giving up all alcoholic liquor himself and issuing orders against its consumption in the Royal Household, so that no difference shall be made so far as His Majesty is concerned between the treatment of the rich and poor in this question.'

And a few days later His Majesty directed the closing of his wine-cellars, a step in which he was followed by Lord Kitchener and other leading men . . ."



## THE TRANSPORT WORKERS' FEDERATION

The Transport Workers' Federation declared that it was prepared for "any drastic action" and stated:

"We are convinced that, although excessive drinking is indulged in by only a small minority, so interdependent is modern labour that the diminished efficiency of this minority has a marked influence upon the output of the total number of men engaged in any set of operations."

### LLOYD GEORGE ACTS

Delay still ensued — attributable, it is believed, to the efforts of the trade who suggested purchase and nationalization, but on April 25th Mr. Lloyd George brought down a bill amending the War Measures Act and proposing the imposition of very heavy taxes on liquors and taking on power to close public-houses where thought necessary and to establish a Liquor Control Board. In introducing the measure he stated:

"The consideration of this question was forced upon us by officials responsible for the output of war material and transport . . .

"All classes in the community are agreed that no wise Government ever asks a nation for an unnecessary sacrifice. Every unnecessary sacrifice means a waste of moral material, the most valuable of all contributions, whether in peace or war. Therefore, when I

submit these proposals, I shall submit them with that test and for that criticism that they are necessary to enable us now to win victory — not to give ultimate victory, but victory without unnecessary loss of time and without the unnecessary loss of brave lives who are fighting for us. We all owe that to them. What is the case for interference, I admit, with the habits of the people—I do not disguise it, I do not minimise it in the slightest degree—and interference with interests? I do not minimise that. What is the case?"

He then cited some of his former statements and continued: "Whatever you propose, it involves a measure of surrender and of abnegation by those who are not to blame. Wars are now waged, not by armies but by nations, and nations therefore must be under discipline like armies. I am not proposing anything to-day as a solution of Temperance, as a promotion of sobriety, as an advancement of any social reform. Whatever I propose I propose as an act of discipline during the war and for the purpose of making war efficiently. All discipline involves a surrender of liberty. There are two millions of men in this country who voluntarily surrendered their liberty to serve their country, cherished liberties, liberties of the most elementary kind that no one would dream of interfering with, but they have done so because their country needs it and if it had not needed it such discipline would be irksome and humiliating.



"Why is it necessary to impose restraints? Is it because these men would not do their duty? No. It is because you always get in every body, in every rank of life, in every class and race, a body of men who cannot, through some inherent or acquired weakness, do without these restraints. The majority have got to endure the same restraints, because if these men fail the whole Army fails. But that is equally true of a nation in case of war. We invite the House of Commons to consider remedies which may affect everybody and may effect communities against which there is no complaint."

#### WHAT THE BOARD DID

Owing to strenuous opposition of the trade, the heavy taxes proposed were abandoned, but the bill was finally adopted on May 19, 1915. The result was the setting-up of The Central Control Board (Liquor Traffic) by order-in-council as of date June 10th, 1915. The regulations of the Liquor Control Board included the following changes:

1. The hours of sale throughout Great Britain were reduced from a possible 18 to 5½ (2½ in the daytime and 3 in the evening) the sale of alcoholic liquors being prohibited before 12 noon and between 2.30 p.m. and 6 or 6.30 p.m.

2. The sale or supply of spirit for off-consumption was prohibited in the evening and on Saturdays.

3. Treating or giving credit for drink were prohibited (made criminal offenses both parties being punishable).

4. Clubs as well as public houses became subject to the restrictions.

5. Licensed premises were permitted to serve other refreshments.

6. Permission was given to reduce the alcoholic content of liquors.

7. The Board took power to purchase and close public houses and to prohibit all sale in certain areas. This was actually done in the vicinity of training camps and naval yards and in areas devoted to shipbuilding and production of munitions.

From this action sprang not only greatly improved production and efficiency in the war but considerable permanent improvement in regard to the drink problem in Britain.

Looking back at these events from the vantage ground of 1936, Lloyd George, in an introduction to Philip Snowden's pamphlet "End This Colossal Waste", wrote:

"I can speak with some knowledge on this issue, because during the Great War I found that drink was rotting our national effort at equipment in deadly fashion. It became indeed a choice between alcohol and victory. Only by taking stern and revolution-



ary measures to restrict the use of liquor were we able to maintain the industrial activity which carried us through those terrible years to a final triumph."

A brief summary of some of the results as affecting Great Britain is cited by Dr. C. C. Weeks.

"Convictions for drunkenness fell from 188,877 in 1913 to 29,075 in 1918 (women, 35,765 to 7,222; men 153,112 to 21,853).

"Deaths from alcoholism fell from 1,112 men and 719 women to 222 and 74.

"Deaths from cirrhosis of the liver fell from 2,215 men and 1,665 women to 943 and 510 (1919).

"The suffocation of children (under one year) numbered 1,226 in 1913 and 557 in 1918, and was still only 541 in 1921.

"Running alongside of these spectacular results, there was an almost universal recognition of increased efficiency, less lost time, less sickness, and fewer accidents.

"Perhaps one of the most striking witnesses came from the CHIEF CONSTABLES, who recognized the improvement in many directions as one expressed himself 'it is like living in another better world.' "

Similar conditions though less pronounced, led seven provinces in Canada to pass as war measures, laws forbidding the sale of

liquor as a beverage. Another province forbade sale of spirits and the remaining province was already under a prohibitory law. Toward the close of the war period the Dominion Government by order-in-council forbade the manufacture of alcohol for beverage purposes. The results of these measures are reflected in the public records in a great reduction of the offences usually associated with drinking.

