



Speech by

Mr JIM PEARCE

MEMBER FOR FITZROY

Hansard 10 November 1999

LIQUOR AMENDMENT BILL

Mr PEARCE (Fitzroy—ALP) (9.16 p.m.): I have thought long and hard about making a contribution to this debate. As a returned serviceman, I am not one for talking up my active service or any other role that I have played while I was in national service. However, I felt that I should say something during this debate. With a very humble background, I am not recognised in this House as a good speaker, but I can say that when I do rise to speak, I speak from my heart. The things that I will be saying in this debate are from the heart and are spoken with sincerity.

First, I wish to correct a claim that I made in this place during an earlier debate on the same issue. Honourable members may recall that I claimed to be the only returned serviceman in the Parliament of Queensland. I have since been made aware that there is actually another Vietnam vet who is a member here. I respect his right to his privacy and to keep that active service to himself. I apologise to the House for making that claim about being the only member to serve in South Vietnam. I was not aware of that fact at the time. In fact, I think it is great that we do have a second member in this Parliament who has served his country.

In over 40 years of attending the Anzac Day services—in the last 10 years as a local member doing two, three and four services on the day—I have to tell honourable members that I have never ever seen a service disrupted by any member of the public. Never have I seen a service disrupted by any one or any thing other than by, I have to say, people such as myself. We go to the dawn service, we have a few little rum and milks—a few drinks—the day starts to roll on and we start to enjoy ourselves. I said this here before the last time I spoke and some idiot from the media took an opportunity to misquote me and take the whole thing out of context.

I have stood at the morning service, in particular, after the dawn service after we have had brekkie and I have had to chip some of my mates. I probably have been chipped, too, because I have been having a good time. It is my day; I am going to enjoy myself. We have had to be chipped, but it is not because we were disrespectful; we just forgot where we were at the time. We have our mates there, we are talking about times of the past and how things are, and we just forget. With a little bit of pulling back into line, everybody falls back into the respectful part of the service. That is the honesty of it. That would be about the only way that I have seen a service disrupted: through people like me having a bloody good time and standing there and just forgetting where I am. We mean no disrespect to the service, no disrespect to the diggers of the world wars that have been before us; we were just having a good time.

Sadly, the Opposition has turned this debate into a farce. To me, this debate is an embarrassment. We have politicians in this place who are prepared to turn a non-existent problem into a political issue in the hope that they will hit on the emotions of every Queensland citizen who has respect for Anzac Day, the diggers who gave their lives, the diggers who still suffer from the effects of war and their families and communities. There are former prisoners of war who still suffer.

The Anzac Day trading hours issue is a cheap stunt. Every member who has spoken in this place has talked about what Anzac Day means to them and their families. I believe that they have been sincere about their personal feelings, about how they feel about Anzac Day, and I respect that. Every person on both sides of the House respects the feelings of others here. There is something

wrong with us if we do not. I do not think anybody in this place should question the sincerity of anybody else in this place in relation to how they feel about Anzac Day.

The member for Gregory is not a member of the same party as I am, but his electorate adjoins mine. We talk on a regular basis and I consider myself a pretty good friend. Since I have known Vaughan, I do not think a year has gone by in which he has not contacted me in the days leading up to Long Tan Day and wished me all the best. That is how he feels. He is fair dinkum, he is sincere and I appreciate those calls that he gives me.

As I said, every member in this place respects Anzac Day, but I believe that the need on the part of some to turn Anzac Day into a political stunt is a disgrace, because there is no issue. Some members are drumming up something that does not exist. It is an embarrassment to me to sit here and listen to some of the arguments that have been put forward to try to justify the position that the Opposition is taking. It is obscene, because there is no issue.

The Minister mentioned the amendments made to the Liquor Act in the 1960s or 1970s. He told the House that the Returned & Services League of Australia—the representative body of the returned members of the armed forces in this country—had an input into the legislative changes. It had the opportunity to raise the matters we are discussing in this debate. Over the years the RSL had plenty of opportunities to seek changes if it felt that Anzac Day services were not getting the respect that they so rightly deserve. The RSL clubs can set an example, if an example needs to be set, by closing their own doors.

It is 84 years since the first Anzac Day service and we have had 34 years of conservative Government since World War II. In that time there has been one reported incident—at Surfers Paradise. The then Premier felt at the time that it was not an issue. Did he go to the police? I cannot recall him going to the police. When he was in the box seat, as the Premier, did he seek to change the legislation? He was in the right place to get it done as quickly as possible. Did he seek to change the legislation to restrict trading hours? No. Was there an outcry from the RSL movement? No. Were there calls from the public for legislative change? No, because it was an isolated incident. There was no call for change. There should be no politically-driven emotional push for change in this place at this time.

If we look at restricting trading hours for hotels and nightclubs, we should look at locking bar fridges, stopping the sale of takeaway and stopping people from having parties in the lead-up to Anzac Day morning. That is what those opposite are talking about, because people are going to enjoy themselves and have a few drinks. It does not matter whether they are out in the city, out at a barbecue or whatever. If they are going home at that hour of the day, they are still in a position to cause trouble, but they do not because the majority of Australian citizens respect Anzac Day for what it is.

This debate is a sham. It is a political stunt and it is members playing politics. Since this debate started I have had not one person contact me asking me to support this legislation. I have spoken to a number of other members and they have said that they have had no-one contact their office in relation to this matter. I have had no RSL contact my office asking me to support this legislation. I cannot see where the issue is. As far as I am concerned it is a non-event.

As an ex-serviceman, I can assure members—members know that I can get pretty angry at times—that if I thought Anzac Day services were under threat from disrespectful drunks I would be the first person into this place to try to do something about it and I would fight all the way. I would want change because there would be a fair dinkum reason to demand change.

Some of the things said by members on the other side of the House are a bit of a joke. There has been one registered complaint in 84 years, and here we have an outpouring of emotions and a call for changes to be made to the liquor laws. For years when those opposite were in Government they refused to pass legislation in relation to this issue. They had the opportunity to legalise two-up, for example. Police were required to turn a blind eye to people breaking the law. Those opposite let that happen because they respected Anzac Day for what it is.

One of the greatest shams of this debate that has come to light is the hypocrisy of the conservatives in this place. They stand here attempting to shame the Government into accepting this unnecessary legislation because they pretend to want to ensure respect for Anzac Day, yet they fail to do the decent thing in maintaining support for our returned servicemen and women and their families, who did the right thing for us. Some did not return and some who did return still suffer.

Those opposite allowed their own constituency—small businesses in Queensland—who were party to a 1965 agreement with the Government, to waltz on a deal that they made when they were in Government some 34 years ago. Members might recall: before 1965 Anzac Day was a closed day in Queensland. No theatres, hotels, clubs, sporting venues or stores were allowed to operate. The day was the most solemn in the annual holiday calendar for Queensland.

In 1965, the conservative State Government agreed to allow afternoon trading on the understanding that businesses would support an annual appeal from their trading profits. The businesses allowed to trade under the agreement were supposed to make voluntary donations to help the widows, the families and the organisations that were out there looking after returned servicemen and women—the very people those opposite call on us to respect.

Mr Healy: With bipartisan support.

Mr PEARCE: That is right. The Government of the day legislated to have proceeds from racing, hotels and other sanctioned activities go to an Anzac Day trust fund. That was great. I think that was a good thing to do. However, the Act did not require businesses which trade on Anzac Day to make donations. The agreement was made in good faith. What has happened to that agreement? All but about 200 Queensland businesses are not honouring that deal. More than 2,000 small businesses are not contributing to what was set up to look after the families of ex-servicemen. These are the constituents of members opposite, but what are they doing about this to make sure that those people contribute? I have spoken about that in this place before.

Mr Healy interjected.

Mr PEARCE: The member has a small business constituency, and he has allowed them to get away with this for years. One has only to look at some of the figures. In 1989-90, \$13,970 came into the fund from small business. In 1991, the figure was \$13,800; in 1991-92, \$11,000; and in 1992-93, \$12,000. In 1995-96, \$761,000 went into the trust. Only \$11,000 of that came from voluntary contributions. It is those people out there to whom members opposite gave the opportunity to trade who are supposed to be giving money to organisations that look after returned servicemen and women and their families and all those widows who need help. But they are not doing it.

How fair dinkum are Opposition members if they are trying to pull at the emotions of Queenslanders and trying to force this Government into changing trading hours, which they implemented, when they do not have the courage to go out there and talk to small businesses and say to them, "Contribute to this organisation, because that was part of the agreement"? This whole issue is about getting into the gutter to score political points. It is about self-interest ahead of a sincere and genuine concern about our most solemn day, when we remember so many people who made the supreme sacrifice and those who still suffer today—their families and all those other people who care about them.

The other alarming aspect of this debate and the arguments that have been put forward by members opposite is that it was the conservative Government in the 1970s that extended trading hours for hotels and other entertainment venues—in the 1970s; 30 years ago. No-one, until 1998, has had reason to raise the matter of extended trading hours for licensed hotels and clubs; there has been no reason to, because Australians—young and old—respect Anzac Day for what it is. But after one isolated incident—a media stunt, a media opportunity—the Opposition, which has no direction, is wasting the time of this Parliament on an issue that does not exist. Opposition members are making it up. They are pulling at people's emotions because they want to try to score cheap political points.

The Opposition, the Nationals, the Liberals and others have disgraced themselves on this issue in their creation of the perception that our young Australians are drunks and disgraceful and disrespectful to our diggers and their families and those in the community who attend Anzac Day services. They want to close down their entertainment venues—a lifestyle that they enjoy and which was fought for and won by our diggers. If those members are fair dinkum, they should be out there talking to small businesspeople and getting them to contribute to a fund which was set up to look after returned servicemen and their families.

There is one other thing that I am going to put to members opposite before I close, and if they are fair dinkum they will support me on this one, too. Members may not be aware of this—and the figures may not be 100% correct, but I think that I am pretty accurate—but there are only about 50 World War I veterans still alive today. World War I, or the Great War as it was known, was falsely predicted to be the war to end all wars. Fifty of the 333,000 young Australian volunteers who went abroad to fight at Gallipoli and in the battlefields of the Middle East and in France are still alive. More than 60,000 died and more than one third of the rest were wounded. Of those World War I heroes, I believe—and I could be proved wrong—only three veterans from Gallipoli remain alive today.

If members opposite want to show respect for those people, I put this to them. A constituent of mine by the name of Neville Thring was right when he said to me recently, "With the inevitable passing of those veterans, another chapter in the history of Australia will close." I want to see Australian Governments prepare now for what will be a sad day for all Australians, that is, the day when we lose our very last Gallipoli digger.

On the day of that funeral, all Australians should be asked to observe and respect one minute's silence. The Australian flag should be lowered at half mast with the playing of the last post across the

airways of Australian radio and the ringing of church bells across the nation. That should be a special day—a day in which members opposite are trying to tell me they believe, respect and trust. It should be a special day, a day that has the support of all people, a day when we say "goodbye and thank you" to those who fought at Gallipoli—the place that inspired the spirit of the Anzacs, and that spirit will linger with us all.

I urge our Premier, other Premiers and the Prime Minister to move now and put in place plans for the day when, unfortunately, we will lose our last Gallipoli veteran and he is buried. Let him go. Let that man go with the knowledge that all Australians will remember him and those who went before him.

Members, this debate is a farce. As a returned serviceman, I am embarrassed by some of the things that have been put up. I know that Opposition members are sincere in the respect that they have for Anzac Day, for the diggers and what it means. But they are trying to force this Government to support legislation when there is no need to change legislation, because the issue does not exist. Amongst the public to whom I have spoken—and I have gone out of my way to do so— I have not had anybody say to me, "Jim Pearce, I want you to get up in the Parliament and support that legislation."

Time expired.
