



Speech by

Mr J. HEGARTY

MEMBER FOR REDLANDS

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LIQUOR AMENDMENT BILL

Mr HEGARTY (Redlands—NPA) (9.13 p.m.): This debate tonight is specifically about changes to the Liquor Act relating to restricted trading hours for licensed clubs on the eve of Anzac Day. Closing clubs a few hours earlier to ensure that there are no unwarranted interruptions to Anzac Day dawn services, that are conducted near such establishments, should be endorsed unanimously by members on both sides of the House.

Ironically, the licensed clubs in this State have no problem with the proposed trading hours amendment. In fact, nearly all, without exception, are very supportive of the returned servicemen and women in their respective communities. But more generally, this debate is about recognising the contribution that many men and women have made in the defence force of this country over the past 100 years and continue to make to this day. This debate is more about ensuring that due honour and respect is afforded to past and present servicemen and women on this one day that has become recognised as symbolic of the coming of age of this nation.

Other members have acknowledged the resurgent interest by the general public in Anzac Day celebrations, particularly the younger generation. I would not like to see this enthusiasm dissuaded by any incidents— isolated though they may be—that might project an image of insecurity in attending Anzac Day dawn services.

The World War I exploits of the Anzacs have become recognised as the hallmark for successive Anzac Day celebrations that have ensued from the first Anzac Day in 1916, when troops were still on the battlefields in Palestine and France, yet the exploits of the Anzacs at Anzac Cove in 1915 were recognised by Anzac Day marches in the cities throughout Australia. I believe that Brisbane may have been the first of those capital cities to hold such a march. The 60,000 deaths and a further 150,000 casualties that occurred during the exploits of Australian servicemen in the Middle East and in Europe, out of the Australian population at that time, which was probably somewhere between four million and five million people, makes us realise that we did pay an horrific price for what we did in the cause of freedom and in the defence of the Mother Country, as it was seen at that time, in its war against Germany and the other powers.

I would like to recount to members of the House—most of whom, I expect, would know this history—Australia's and, prior to its becoming Australia, pre-Federation colonial military history, which highlights some of the exploits of the settlers of this country, who would have regarded themselves as Australians—although it was not an autonomous country prior to Federation in 1901.

One hundred years ago last month, the first troops from New South Wales were sent to South Africa following the outbreak of the Boer War. They were training in England at the time at Aldershot Barracks, but within three weeks of the outbreak of war they were in service in South Africa. Other Australian colonies sent troops also, the first troops arriving in South Africa in December 1899, with the Queenslanders being the first to see action. Troops from the Australian colonies continued to serve throughout the war until 1902, following the formation of the Commonwealth Defence Force, when the first contingent of troops from the newly federated colonies arrived and fought as a nation in the name of the Australian Commonwealth Horse.

In 1900, during the height of the Boer War, another incident occurred in China, euphemistically called the Boxer Rebellion, named after a group of fanatical Chinese who were sworn to rid China of all foreigners. They were more correctly called the Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists, but the nickname "Boxers" stuck, because of the callisthenics and other exercises that they undertook, which they believed, if practised, would make them impervious to bullets. Not officially recognised by the Chinese Government at the time, they were backed by the Dowager Empress of China—a situation not unlike recent local events, where a Government does not want to be seen to be involved but uses other groups within its society to act as agents on its behalf.

A naval brigade—a contingent of Australians destined for South Africa—was diverted to China and served as part of Admiral Seymour's force to relieve the diplomatic legation in Peking who were under siege at the time. These and other actions were fought by Australian servicemen over a period of a year or so.

Going further back into Australian colonial history—the first time that Australian volunteers saw action was during the Maori wars in the 1840s. The first Maori war started in the 1840s, and it involved troops from New Zealand, of course, and the Australian colonies. The colonies' armed forces at the time were comprised of militia units, commanded by the British, who also had their own permanent forces garrisoned in Australia and in New Zealand. The threat of the Maori nation of 56,000 people, mostly from the North Island, was against a few thousand white settlers. The Victorian Government sent its entire naval component, comprising the Steam Corvette Victoria. The Maori problem arose again in the 1860s. This time, a force of 10,000 troops was raised to fight the Maoris. Again, 2,500 soldiers from the Australian colonies fought between 1863 and 1872. Incidentally, after the war a number of servicemen settled there, taking advantage of the land grants that were offered as a reward for service. That became a common practice as a way of recognising those Australians who served in the militia right up until the latter part of the 19th century. Again, at that time, Australia's population was not large—less than two million people. So our contribution to wars has always been significant compared to Australia's population at the time.

In the 1880s, following the death of General Gordon at Khartoum, the first Sudan war occurred. Again, Australia responded to Great Britain's request for military forces from the colonies. Over 500 infantrymen and a further 200 artillerymen from New South Wales were sent. They arrived towards the end of the campaign and saw only minor action. However, a Field Battery of the Royal Australian Artillery, the oldest continually serving unit in the Australian Army, carries the battle honour for Suakin, one of the battles of that campaign.

From those early pre-Federation days, the rest of Australia's military history is fairly well known to most Australians—the exploits of the Anzacs and their sons in the Second World War. Between those wars, there was no actual force deployed, but a number of servicemen served in India. After the Second World War, there was the Malayan conflict, the Korean conflict, the Borneo and Malay Peninsula conflicts, and the Vietnam War. Since then, Australia has participated in a number of United Nations peacekeeping forces, which brings me to the present, where at this very time our troops are holding up that Anzac tradition in East Timor. If I may, I will add my voice to those who have commented on the professionalism that those soldiers have displayed, which has always been the hallmark of the Australian Defence Force. They are doing an exemplary job.

Although tonight we are debating whether to restrict the liquor trading laws on Anzac Day eve, I think that whenever we talk about anything to do with Australia's military history, we should bear in mind that we are still a young country. We still do not have the sense of history that the United States, the United Kingdom and all of those European countries have had for hundreds and hundreds of years. Yet in our very short history, I think that we have acquitted ourselves magnificently. Fortunately for all of Australia, that has always been done beyond our shores. I sincerely hope that that will always be the case for as long as there may be conflict threatening the Australian population, to which the Australian Defence Force has always readily reacted, generally speaking with the utmost support from the Australian community at large.

Although we may differ over whether the matters contained in this Bill are significant—whether the incident in which the denigration of an Anzac Day dawn service occurred was an isolated incident, or whether such an occurrence might spread to other services, or whether such an incident may not occur again—I do not think that is the issue. I think the issue is the fact that, on that one special day of the year, Australians recognise—and, fortunately, more Australians are recognising it, including the younger generation—that this is a very significant day that commemorates when Australia acted as a nation in the first major conflict of this century. I would not like to see any slur cast on that Remembrance Day by any act, small or large.

This issue relates to trading hours. I think that if the issue was put to the Australian population at large, there would be unanimous agreement that they would forgo those couple of hours of extra trading for any licensed establishment that they may frequent. To honour of all of those past

servicemen and women and also those present and future servicemen and women who would use this day as their special day to honour not only their own contributions but also those of their mates should be paramount.

I do not think that we can dismiss the matters contained in this Bill and attend to them in some other way, such as increasing the presence of the Police Service at centres where incidents may occur. I think that we should do the right thing by the people of this country, by the servicemen and women who gave their lives—many have lost their loved ones, and to this day there are casualties— and pay them due reverence from midnight on 24 April of each year until midday of Anzac Day and restrict liquor licensing.

I think that that is a very small token that we as representatives of the Queensland public can offer to enshrine a very significant memory that most people have, if not of their immediate families, of friends, relatives or acquaintances who have served or are presently serving in the armed forces of this country. That will ensure Anzac Day receives the honour and respect that it has received in the past and, hopefully, will continue to receive. In this way, the esteem in which Anzac Day is held will continue to grow among the younger generation of Australians. For that reason, I ask all members to put these technicalities aside, to vote in the spirit of this Bill and to pass the regulations necessary to restrict trading hours past midnight on 24 April each year.
