



Speech by

PAUL LUCAS MLA

MEMBER FOR LYTTON

Hansard 24 November 1999

LIQUOR AMENDMENT BILL

Mr LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (9.04 p.m.): Before I speak to the Bill in particular, I will say a few words about the essential Australian character. When I think of what makes Australians Australians—regardless of where they were born, their station in life or whether they are male or female—I think of one of the great defining things that makes our country different from other countries; that is, the spirit of Anzac. Anzac Day services commemorate not only servicemen at Anzac Cove during the First World War—there were conflicts before then and there have been conflicts since—but also so many people who made great sacrifices for our country in times of war. This includes those who stayed at home and their families who supported those who went to war, and those who were too ill to fight but supported in reserved occupations. This says a lot about our country. When we look at the losses that were suffered proportionately by Australia in the First World War we see the tremendous support that Australian diggers gave in the interests of fair play, goodness, honesty and opposition to totalitarianism.

That service to our great country is not political service. I can think of three members in my Labor Party branch—Bill Davidson, Harry Ballment and Stewie Simmons—who are fantastic blokes, great Labor Party members and, more importantly, fantastic ex-servicemen from the Second World War. There are people such as this in every political party. I know that there are people such as them in the National and Liberal Parties. I know that there are people such as them in the One Nation Party—

Mr Knuth: And the Country Party.

Mr LUCAS: And the Country Party. There are also such people who do not have any particular political affiliation or observance. What is more important—it is more important to them—is how they banded together and defended the freedoms they fought so hard for and many lost their lives to protect. We in this Parliament now have the ability to assert those freedoms because of the sacrifices those people made.

There have been some exceptional contributions to this debate, which has proceeded over a number of evenings. I am not going to be political tonight, because I think there were some excellent contributions made by members on both sides of the House. I will single out two that I think were very considered and well thought out contributions—that is, those of the member for Rockhampton, Mr Schwarten, and the member for Burleigh, Mrs Gamin. I thought they were excellent contributions to the debate. I am a bit sad that one or two people in this Chamber have seen fit to play politics. Fortunately, most people have not.

I go to Anzac Day ceremonies each year. I went long before I was elected. I went long before I became an adult. I take my family, and I do it proudly. Why do I do that? It is not because there is some law that says, "You must go to Anzac Day ceremonies", and it is not because there is some practice that stipulates that members of Parliament must go to Anzac Day ceremonies. As someone who asserts the rights to live in this great democratic country—rights that were defended and won with the blood, sweat and toil of many ex-servicemen and women over many years—it is the very least I can do.

The reason I take my kids—and I am sure it is the reason other people take their kids—is, again, not because I am told to and not because the schools think it is a good idea, but because it is so important to inculcate our children with those views. It is important to let them understand the

sacrifice that has been made and to let them understand the horrors of war and the great contribution made by our ex-servicemen, not only in that Anzac Gallipoli conflict but also before then, in the Boer War, and since then, in World War II, Korea, Vietnam and, in more modern times, in the Gulf and in East Timor. I am sure that we all send our strongest support to our brave men and women in East Timor. Many of the residents of East Timor lost their lives at the hands of Japanese in the Second World War, so it is great to see that we are in some way realising our responsibilities to that country.

As the member for Burdekin pointed out, the spirit is still alive, not only in those ex-servicemen and women but in their families and in our families and in the people who go in increasing numbers to those Anzac Day ceremonies—not for any legislated reason but because it is the right thing to do and because it is part of being an Australian. When I attend an Anzac Day ceremony, the thing that drives this home to me more than anything else is when I look around and see who is there. Most of the diggers, especially from World War II, are elderly men in their seventies and eighties. But the schoolchildren who attend from a number of local schools are, on average, 12 or 13 years of age. We must remember that those schoolchildren are far more representative of the people who made the supreme sacrifice than I am at 37, because the people who gave their blood for this country were young people. They were 18; some of them were 17 and 16, and some of them were 19 and 20. They gave the prime of their lives. They did not go when they said, "Gee, I have had a good innings. I am 65 now. I am prepared to make the supreme sacrifice." They went when they were 16, 17 and 18. And I believe that it makes their sacrifice greater and all the more impressive when one considers what the fallen were like.

I can understand how veterans think back on their service and how it makes them so sad. For example, when we go to a funeral for someone who was 85 or 90, we say, "They had a good innings and it was great to know them." But when we think that their mates were 18 or 16 when they got killed defending our liberties, we think, "What a sacrifice! How lucky we are that they were prepared to do that." I believe that the Australian condition has remained the same. Many people—and Timor is a classic example of it—are still prepared to make that great contribution and commitment in our armed services, regardless of whether it is the Navy, the Army or the Air Force.

I want to put a proposition to members. What is the difference between these two dates: Anzac Day and the Queen's birthday? They are both legislated public holidays in this country. But why do people think of Anzac Day differently? It is not because of the law; it is because of what it stands for. That is why I must respectfully disagree with my parliamentary colleagues on the other side of the House. In every other State, except Western Australia, the law is different from what it is in Queensland. Those other States allow open trading on Anzac Day—which, of course, I do not support.

We do not create respect for the sacrifice legislatively; we create it by remembering the fallen and the sacrifices that they made. Even if the contributions of members tonight and over the past few occasions when this legislation has been debated have done nothing, and if we have to disagree on the issue at hand, at least it has reminded us all that, regardless of the political outlook of the diggers involved or of members here, it is great to be an Australian and to remember the sacrifice that those people made. That is why I am honoured to assert the freedom to make a speech tonight in thanks to them.
