



Speech by

Hon. R. SCHWARTEN

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Hansard 27 October 1999

LIQUOR AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. R. E. SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton— ALP) (Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing) (9.37 p.m.): I was not going to speak in this debate. I have listened very intently to the contributions that have been made this evening. I have actually been speaking to an old digger tonight and allowed him to hear some of the contributions via the phone. I refer to my father, who was in the 9th Division in the Second World War and served in the Middle East, Borneo and New Guinea. I want to speak on his behalf tonight, because other people seem to want to talk on behalf of diggers. I want to talk on his behalf, as he has asked me to do.

His view is very simple. He said, "If you could change the way people thought by closing the pub at midnight, then go and vote for it." The reality is that he joined the Labor Party after what he saw in the Middle East, where he saw poverty stricken kids scrambling through the remnants of what came out of his dixie. That was his view when he came back from the Army. He pursued an issue of social justice for the rest of his life as a result of it. If people think that we can close the pub at midnight and all feel good about it and that is the most effort that we make to honour what those people fought for and what they stood for, then I think it is pretty weak.

The member for Callide can shake his head. That is okay. He can be as offensive as he likes. He can insult my father if he so desires. That is what he is doing by his comments. I am repeating what my father said. If the member for Callide wants to insult my father's remarks, then he can go right ahead. I have not chosen to be personal about this at all. The point I am making is the point that my father made to me. I would ask for a bit of respect in that regard, to have his words heard.

Everybody has an emotional contribution to make to this debate. It is a very emotional subject. I have been at the Anzac parade in Rockhampton for the last 20 years. I have never once seen it disrupted by drunken oafs—never, ever.

Mr Nelson: The thin blue line.

Mr SCHWARTEN: There have never been any police at it, either. The dawn service in Rockhampton is not something that is being cordoned off by the police, and no police presence is required there.

Mr Nelson: They are at the march.

Mr SCHWARTEN: They are at the march, and they march proudly in it. No dawn service that I have been at has been disrupted by drunken behaviour. The local RSL has never ever raised a complaint about it.

Mr Pearce: There have been none made to me, either.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I am sure that the honourable member for Keppel would say the same thing if he were here, because he also attends dawn services. There has never been a complaint to my office as a result of Anzac Day dawn services. If members think that by closing the hotels at midnight they can stop people from being disrespectful, then I wish them well.

Mr Seeney: What's the harm in it? What's the problem?

Mr SCHWARTEN: Why does the honourable member want to do it? What if the local RSL club in Rockhampton wants to stay open until 3 o'clock in the morning or open at 5 o'clock in the morning so that people can have a couple of rums with their old mates? What is wrong with that? Nothing. This is about people's attitudes. It is not about whether people have a drink. It is the attitude of people who come along and behave disrespectfully that matters.

It is just the same as when I witnessed a drunken display at a funeral some years ago. That was just as bad. That is not about whether we should close the pubs for funerals. That is about people and their lack of respect for their fellow human beings. We do not change that view by passing a piece of legislation to close the pubs at midnight on Anzac Day.

The reality is that there are some people who cannot behave themselves, regardless of whether those hotels are open. The Minister made the point earlier that people could come from private parties and misbehave. There is no guarantee that the people involved in the incident spoken about came from licensed premises. The simple fact remains that we cannot stop people from being disrespectful. If honourable members think they can, then they should go ahead and vote for the legislation. They are entitled to do that.

My own father's view on this issue was that one of the freedoms people really fought for was the right to have a beer. He has never ever been engaged in that sort of behaviour. Neither have I and neither has any member of our family, because we actually do have some respect for those sets of circumstances.

I think it was the member for Gladstone who talked about the people who have come back from seeing those dreadful things. My father has committed himself to the peace movement ever since. Ever since, he has committed himself to that view. I know that the member for Gregory, who knows my dad, would agree with that. He is a very upstanding citizen. I believe that his views are just as important as those of anybody else in this whole debate.

The point I leave with the House is that, if by some quirk this Bill is passed tonight, honourable members should not go away feeling good and thinking to themselves, "Haven't we done a wonderful thing, honouring all those diggers by closing the pubs at midnight?" They would be better off going back into their communities to see why people behave as they do and try to do something to change it. They should get into their schools and talk to the kids and find out why they are angry and why they want to indulge in that behaviour. They should get into our community and foster some unity of purpose and some decency.

Let us not judge the majority by the minority. That is what this is about. This is about saying to people that the way we engender respect is to close the pubs. The member for Tablelands might think it is funny, but I do not.

Mr NELSON: I rise to a point of order. The only disrespect I have is for the Minister, not for anybody else on the subject.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Reeves): Order! There is no point of order. The member will resume his seat.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I will not even dignify the remarks of the member for Tablelands with an answer. I understand that this is something that members will feel strongly about and that they think they are doing the right thing, but they should not leave it at what they have said here tonight. They should get out there and try to find out why these half a dozen kids have disrupted a service and behaved disgracefully.

Honourable members should not think for one moment that they are making heroes of themselves by standing up or shaking their heads and saying, "Let's close the pubs and dignify the Anzacs and dignify the Second World War veterans"—or any other veterans—"by doing that", because that is hypocrisy in the extreme.

I know that people such as the member for Gregory spoke with sincerity and decency on this issue and I know that he feels very strongly about it. I have no disrespect at all for what he has said—he is entitled to his view—but all I ask is that honourable members put this issue into some perspective. Let us say, "This is an issue not about alcohol. It is not about closing pubs. It is about people who do not have the same mores and social conscience that the rest of us have." Let us look at that. Let us not look at the pubs.
