



Speech by

Hon. RUSSELL COOPER

MEMBER FOR CROWS NEST

Hansard 10 November 1999

LIQUOR AMENDMENT BILL

Mr COOPER (Crows Nest—NPA) (10.33 p.m.): I join with all of those who have chosen to speak to the Liquor Amendment Bill 1999. I commend the member for Toowoomba North for foreshadowing an amendment to the Bill. There are several reasons I want to speak in this debate. The main reason, of course, is out of sheer respect for Anzac Day and all that it means to this nation. We on this side of the House do not have a monopoly on respect for Anzac Day. It is generally shared around the Chamber.

I am not one who is so emotional as to wear my heart on my sleeve, so I will not be indulging in that particular side of the debate. If others wish to, that is their prerogative. Certainly the RSL people that I knock around with, the men and women around the State, do not indulge in that. They are very straight people who have absolute and utter respect for Anzac Day. They know that they do not have to do that sort of thing. They are the epitome of society and we look up to and respect them. They are a great example for others to follow.

One of the other reasons I speak is to make sure that my constituents gain an understanding of what this debate is all about and why it is being held. Naturally, a few speeches from those on this side, and no doubt from those on the other side, will be circulated around the State in order to let people know where we are coming from and what we think of not only Anzac Day itself but also the reason for the legislation.

It is proposed that all liquor licences, including cabaret licences, cease at midnight on the day prior to Anzac Day. That is really what we are seeking. As the member for Fitzroy said, there has been one reported incident in 84 years. That is not a lot. I recognise that. I reckon there might have been a few other incidents besides, but this one incident received attention around the State, and rightly so.

This is an opportunity to reclaim the early hours of the morning—that is, midnight to dawn on Anzac Day—in a mark of respect for Anzac Day. Others may think that is no big deal, but as far as I am concerned this is an opportunity to take back those particular hours. It is not much to ask, but it is a major mark of respect in relation to Anzac Day and all that it means.

I think what really happened—I know that a lot of people on the other side of the House recognise this—is that a mistake was made. The member for Fitzroy said that the debate is a farce, that it is obscene and that it is an embarrassment. Unfortunately, those words really belong with those on the other side, because they have made it an embarrassment. They have made it obscene and they have made it a farce, simply because they have made a wrong decision.

Once the incident occurred and it was suggested that we claim back the early hours of Anzac Day morning, those opposite could have taken a decision to go to the party room and have a little chat about it and then say, "It is not asking for much. This is something we could agree to. Let's do it." But of course those opposite were not big enough to do that. The decision was rushed. It was made in the heat of the moment. It was a wrong decision. That has caused a lot of members of the Government to be embarrassed. I understand that. I think that is a pity, because if a different decision had been taken we would not have been going on with the discussion for so long.

We intend to go on with this debate because, as I said, it is our opportunity to pay respect and to talk about Anzac Day as such—all that it means, all that goes on during that time and what it means

to our young people as well as ourselves as one of the most sacred days that we have in the nation. A lot of people we talk to now say that Anzac Day is their Australia Day.

When this matter was previously debated, the member for Ferny Grove made some derogatory remarks about the member for Gladstone. The member for Gladstone, as an Independent and as someone who has been heavily involved in Anzac Day as a result of family involvement and so on, really summed up what this debate is all about when she said that three hours is not much to ask as a mark of respect. The abuse she copped for that was quite extraordinary.

Mr Swarten interjected.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr COOPER: How is the Minister going? Is he all right?

Mr Swarten: Yes, we are all right. Actually, he talked a bit of sense.

Mr COOPER: I take umbrage with the Minister about that. As I said, we can compare notes out there in the public arena—after this is over or before. We will let the people judge. That is the main thing. We will let the people judge whether what the Minister is saying—

Mr Swarten interjected.

Mr COOPER: I have no doubt that Hansard are getting down all of the Minister's interjections.

Mr Swarten: I hope they are.

Mr COOPER: I hope they are, too. The Minister is showing absolute and total disrespect for the argument we are putting forward. As I said, that is something that will be spread all around the countryside. If that is the sort of thing the Minister wants, that is the sort of thing he will get.

Mr Swarten: If it's all right by my old man, it's all right by me.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Clark): Order!

Mr COOPER: The Minister is obviously out of control, Madam Deputy Speaker, but he is yours to control. I do not worry about him.

This gives me an opportunity to mention some of the people in my electorate who are the epitome of society. They are the pillars and the bulwarks of the communities out there and right across the State. This is a wonderful opportunity to tell their story. I first went to an Anzac Day service in about 1976 at Yuleba. That was when I started to get an understanding of what Anzac Day was all about. Members have said that Anzac Day started to gain momentum in the seventies. However, I recall going to Anzac Day services in the sixties, when many of our institutions came under attack from Left Wing elements, particularly the ABC. At that time, the ABC was a Left Wing element, and I think it more or less encouraged the testing of our institutions. Back in those days Anzac Day was marked by disrespect and graffiti on monuments, but the nation rose against that very strongly. Anzac Day withstood all that, and it became stronger and more widely respected.

Mr Swarten interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The Minister is testing the patience of the Chair.

Mr COOPER: As I said, our institutions came under that form of attack, but they withstood it. Since then, people have come to the realisation that Anzac Day is not going to go away; that it will be perpetuated for as long as we exist. That is a good thing for this country, because we do need standards, icons and things to respect. We need examples to be set by people, and I believe that we are very fortunate to have that.

Other members have spoken about how many of our young people attend Anzac Day services. They are not forced to do that. Some people might think that the kids are forced to turn up and play in the marching bands, but they do that because they want to. In the wee hours of the morning, we see them at the dawn services. People think that this is quite incredible; that mum and dad must have forced them to do that. But our young people know a lot about Anzac Day. It is good that they have those standards to live up to. They have a great understanding and respect for their elders and those people who served this country. The benefits that our young people get from Anzac Day are extraordinary. That is why, when opportunities such as this arise, we should claim back some time for Anzac Day. There are lots of reasons to do that.

I turn now to some of the people who are involved in RSL reunion dinners. No doubt members on both sides would have been attending those dinners lately. Unfortunately, when Parliament sits many of us are unable to get to those RSL dinners, but they are fantastic, and I believe that they are gaining support. Many people put a lot of time and effort into those particular functions to make sure that they are a success and that they are real reunions. That is why they are so well attended.

I would like to mention a few people in Crows Nest. St John and Lola Burke uphold the traditions of Anzac Day in that area, along with Bob and Heather Rolfe. Many members would know them. Bob has one of the greatest collections of firearms and ammunition that one would find

anywhere, but he looks after them well and treats them with the utmost respect, knowing full well the dangers of those sorts of things. But nevertheless, they are reminders of wartime. Bob and Heather are the epitome of society in that area, as is Bob Baulch of the Oakey RSL, which is going ahead in leaps and bounds. Some extensions are being undertaken on that RSL hall, and I wish them well with that. Similarly, the Goombungee RSL is making a great impression. I pay respect to Max and Lyn Foote, who uphold those traditions, and long may they continue to do so.

Those people who are in East Timor at the moment will eventually take their place in the RSL on their return. I do not think that anyone really wants to have to serve their country in places like East Timor; but when called upon, those people went, and they have done an unbelievably professional job—a beautifully executed job—and they have earned our respect. It is great that Australia has people like them who are available to do those jobs and carry them out so well. This is an opportunity to wish them well and a safe return and to thank them for their service.

The member for Mount Isa spoke about the local government conference in Toowoomba. There were 1,000 delegates there—whether the Minister likes it or not. It is interesting to note that they had a very strong view about Anzac Day, and they supported this amendment.

Mr Healy: Overwhelmingly.

Mr COOPER: Overwhelmingly. They did not carry on stupidly about it as some members have. They said, "It is not much to ask. It is very simple. It is a great opportunity to take back those few hours in the interests of Anzac Day."

I have mentioned the RSL dinner at Crows Nest. We had some guest speakers there. One was the sergeant of police in Crows Nest, Sergeant Neil Gilloway, who referred to the debate on the republic. He did not say what side he was on; he just said that the very fact that we were able to have that debate on a republic was because this country had been kept safe as a democracy so that we could have freedom of speech. Again, that was because our armed servicemen—our defence forces—had prevailed at various times throughout the past 84 years. I do not think it is too much to ask to return these small things to them.

I need to put on the record the unbelievable remarks made by a spokesman for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Racing, Mr Gibbs, in an article in the Cairns Post about the Cairns RSL. I want to make people in the Crows Nest electorate aware of what was said and done. The article headed "Diggers' rum caught up in booze ban call" states—

"The State Government has warned RSL clubs it could crack down on Diggers who have a shot of rum with breakfast if the league pursues new Anzac Day legislation.

The warning from a spokesman for Tourism ... Minister ... came after Cairns RSL sub-branch president Merv Hains said he was 'disappointed' the Government would not support a proposed alcohol ban after midnight on the eve of Anzac Day."

The article goes on to say—

"Premier Peter Beattie already has indicated the Labor Party will vote against the moves which are due to come up in State Parliament on Wednesday.

The ban first was proposed by the Coalition following an incident where drunk people disrupted an Anzac Day service in 1997."

The spokesman goes on to say—

"If they want us to crack down on nightclubs and bars, we will have to look at our policy of turning a blind eye to Diggers drinking rum at 4.30 in the morning with their cornflakes."

That is so incredible that I can only shake my head at the fact that it was said.

It is not every Anzac Day when they have rum at a dawn service. I wish they did! I know that the one at Old Gowrie does. I am only too happy to partake when I see a couple of bottles of Bundy there at about 4.30 and it is freezing cold. A lot of people are quite happy to accept it—whether or not they normally drink it—because it gets them going for the day. It is a tradition. It does not make people drunk. And the fact that they can do those sorts of things is fine by us. It sets the tone for Anzac Day.

I do not want to prolong the debate except to say that some of the comments that have been made tonight have been a little over the top. Some of those comments have been caused by embarrassment. I believe that most Government members would have been quite happy to support this legislation. However, they were caught out. The decision was made for them without their input. That put them on the spot. I know that those sorts of things can happen; they happen to us sometimes. One has to eat humble pie. It is unfortunate that it occurs in a situation such as this where the matter should be completely apolitical. It is important that we are able to reclaim those precious few hours from midnight to dawn on Anzac Day as a mark of respect.