

GOVERNMENT FOR THE PEOPLE

Should Liquor Talk?

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Part I

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Due to the approaching legislative session I am discontinuing for the present the analysis of the "SEEDS OF WAR" in order that I may take up potential legislation that concerns us all right here at home.

For weeks there have been repeated whispers that one of the major political parties is planning the introduction of liquor legislation. As the place of liquor in society and government is a much mooted subject I propose to bring to the public's attention a few of the important aspects of this problem.

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The manufacture, packaging and sale of intoxicating liquors is a business that affords a living to tens of thousands of men and women just as does the sale of groceries, drugs and shoes.

But unlike most other commodities that man has created for his own consumption the abuse of alcohol has a profound social as well as individual effect. Recognizing the menace in alcohol, legislation has been adopted that has not always been either just or wise toward either the manufacturer or the consumer. In many such cases the results of bad legislation have been worse than the results of drink itself.

Years ago it was the usual thing to see the police of our great cities driving the drunks out of the vacant lots early each morning.

Rum, gin and whiskey were pictured as the ruination of the home, the cause of the son's profligacy and the daughter's wantonness.

The "Whiskey Ring" was said to be the power that kept Maine politically in line, although for years it was a prohibition state. Convinced that liquor and the saloon were social liabilities the Prohibition Amendment and the Volstead Act were pushed through Congress and we were treated to a much more vicious system display of bootlegging, hijacking and political corruption and individual degeneration than was ever conceived during the worst days of the saloon.

Realizing that men could not be made normally good by repressive legislation the Volstead Amendment was repealed and each state was left pretty much to shift for itself in the question of the manufacture and consumption of alcoholic beverages.

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After repeal, Delaware decided to appoint a liquor commissioner who would have definite powers in the control of manufacturing, selling and, as far as possible, the consumption of alcohol. The first commissioner appointed was a very prominent as well as a very wealthy man, and for his services to the state he received no pay and very little thanks.

Since that time our liquor commissioners have been men of personal affluence. I believe every man is worthy of his hire, and that all public officials should be paid, for if they are not it means that a poor man may encounter great difficulties, financial and social, in considering the acceptance of a public trust.

Assisting the liquor commissioner in the performance of his duties is a staff employed by the authority of the state but having none of the benefits, responsibilities or qualifications that must and should be instituted in a modern "Civil Service System." Delaware in many of its governmental branches has been extremely lax, and certainly in the field of liquor enforcement, where the possibilities of corruption are ever present, we have done nothing to establish such a system. I merely mention these points in passing.

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We have been prone to associate liquor with politics, and see in the misuse of the one the corruption of the other. But is this true? For if it is, then liquor is far more dangerous collectively than individually. And if it is true, how is there such a close connection between the two? Why is there not a hook up between politics and pianos, or politics and ice cream—another commodity greatly in demand, or politics and tobacco.

Why do we discriminate and damn alcohol as the bedfellow of corrupt politics?

These are the questions which we should ask ourselves before our legislature meets to take up the matter of the proposed liquor bills, and these are the questions that we should ask our legislators, putting them on the spot of public utterance on such matters.

I hold that what the individual does is first of all his private concern and the concern of his family, but what the state does is the concern of us all. Ask any policeman what he thinks about the midnight deadline for the closing of the tap rooms and clubs, and he will tell you that the deadline is a vicious law and makes for far more drunkenness than if the tap rooms were permitted to stay open all night.

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If this situation exists, and the police should know, we are by a well-intentioned law making for more trouble. Ask any school boy what happens when the cost of a commodity is boosted by a revenue tax, made scarce by complicated regulations, the franchise for sale made desirable by restrictions and arbitrary rulings, and he will tell you that smuggling is the inevitable result.

Ask the legitimate liquor store keeper how to purchase a bottle of whiskey after hours, and he will probably assure you that many a taxi-driver is operating a private liquor business from his cab, and that for the right price the cabby will sell you a bottle.

Thus while we would control the sale of intoxicants, the man who wants it can with surprising ease secure it.

To add to our already complex liquor problem it is whispered that certain wouldbe political bosses

would like to have the Liquor Commission take over all of the liquor stores in the state and make them state-owned, on the plea that by such an act the state would derive the revenue that now goes into private pockets.

In the past, with the change of political administration, we have had a change in Liquor Commissioners, Republican, Democrat, Republican.

With State Stores, being a boodle, or spoils-of-office procedure, it would mean that liquor would enter the political ring, that those who were IN and controlled the stores by appointments, would control political votes; that the potential of political corruption and debauchery would reach a new high even for Delaware.

It is right and proper that we consider liquor legislation in the coming months, but before we enact measures into laws let us consider well the implications.