

NEW ZEALAND WOMEN'S CHRISTIAN TEMPERANCE UNION

(Incorporated)

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The White Ribbon.

"For God, and Home, and Humanity"

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STATE CONTROL OF TRAFFIC IN INTOXICATING LIQUOR

C. HENDERSON, B.A.

By State Control of Liquor we mean a system under which the government of a country assumes control of the manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquor. The business is managed as a State Department, and the employees engaged in the business are civil servants. This method of dealing with the traffic has from time to time found many supporters, some of whom honestly believe that it is the best method of eliminating the evils associated with the consumption of liquor. They argue that most of these evils arise from the excessive consumption of liquor, and that the private licensee, being anxious to sell as much as possible, encourages his employees to promote consumption even to the point of tempting customers to drink more. If the State were the employer, this would not happen because the employee would have nothing to gain by such tactics.

"Eliminate private profit," say the supporters of State Control, "and you solve the problem." Now these well-meaning people forget two basic facts.

(1) That alcohol is a narcotic poison which has the power to create a desire

for itself; and its effects are the same, no matter where, or by whom the alcohol is supplied.

(2) Governments are human, and have an insatiable desire for revenue, and once they find a fruitful source which may be operated without criticism from the majority of the taxpayers, the tendency is to act the part of the private trader, and promote means to increase consumption.

As far as I know, no country has as yet adopted complete State Control. In 1907, Russia took control of the retail trade in intoxicants, but that attempt was ended by the revolution in 1917. Some form of limited control has been tried in other countries, and during the first World War, the Carlisle Trust system was tried out in two towns in Britain. But we associate State Control with Canada rather than with any other country.

Before World War I, some parts of Canada had made considerable progress towards Prohibition, but when the war had started, the Parliament of Canada had decided upon National Prohibition as a war-time measure. When the war was over, the question arose as to whether the country should revert to pre-war conditions or not. The decision was to institute State Control, though what was established was control of the breweries and the retail sale of liquor, the distilleries, of which there were several in the country, being left to private enterprise. At first the conditions of the retail sales were fairly strict, but Canada, like other countries, has suffered from the decline of moral standards, and this decline, added to the lure of greatly increased revenue, has proved too strong for the authorities. A further element in State Control that was highly pernicious was the fact that the law required that surplus profits should be devoted to such charitable objects as the 'Children's Aid Society' (a Government institution operating throughout Canada), and similar charitable objects. So thus the taxpayer was relieved of some of the burden imposed by the necessity of maintaining certain charities, and in addition, many organisations received a welcome subsidy, and the result was that State Control came to be looked upon as a kind of fairy godmother.

But the system must be tested by its results. Was drinking decreased?

Well, the United Church Council states that the use of beverage alcohol has assumed flood-like proportions. In 1946, the expenditure amounted to nearly £106,000,000. Did the people benefit socially or morally? The same church speaks of the great wastage caused by the huge expenditure, and emphasises the social wastage through the wrecking of home life, and the unfitting of many for life's duties. But, if further evidence is required as to the results of State control in Canada, we can find it in the following resolutions passed by the Council of the United Church in Canada, a church with a membership of 750,000.

The Council: "(1) Unequivocally declares that in view of the widespread wreckage of humanity caused by the use of beverage alcohol it is a moral issue and thus challenges each and every member of our communion to face this fact and the issues involved.

"(2) Calls upon each and every member of the United Church to practise total abstinence, believing that it is the only wise and safe course to be followed.

"(3) Calls upon all United Church members to refrain from offering cocktails or other drinks containing beverage alcohol to their guests on any occasion whatsoever.

"(4) Calls upon all United Church members to refrain in any way from investing their money in or becoming directors of corporations related to the production and sale of alcoholic beverages."

In New Zealand, we have introduced what is a modified form of State Control, which differs from what is usually known by the name in that the control is exercised not by a government but by a "trust" which operates through a Board. In the case of Invercargill, the Board is nominated by the Government and Local Bodies. In Masterton, the Board is to be elected. Already the Invercargill "fairy godmother" has been able to distribute her gifts, some of which have been bestowed on sports bodies. This year, I notice that a considerable sum was voted to pay the expenses of Southland Scouts going to the World Jamboree. What must the boys think of such thought for their welfare?

State Control, or Trust Control?
NO!! NO!!!