

Success of Prohibition in Colorado

[Senator Thomas of Colorado made the following speech in the United States senate, December 19, 1916.—Ed.]

Mr. President, the state which I in part represent in this body enacted a prohibition amendment to its constitution in 1914, to become effective on the 1st day of January, 1916. It has therefore been in operation nearly 12 months. Of course that is a comparatively short period of time upon which to base a permanent impression of the good or evil involved in its operation, but it is perhaps sufficiently long to justify me in laying before the senate some of the results, not perhaps of prohibition, but for the period in which it has been effective, upon the material and moral condition of the Commonwealth.

I was much impressed not only during that but in previous campaigns for prohibition with some of the practical arguments or assertions that were made in opposition to it. Consequently I cast my vote against the amendment. Had it been an amendment confined strictly to the abolition of the saloon, I would without question have supported it, but I felt that it would be well for us, inasmuch as we had adopted some other experiments in legislation in advance of the experiences of other states, prudence required that we wait and see the effect of the practical operation of prohibition in states which had preceded us in adopting it before finally crystallizing it into our own constitution.

Some of the arguments or assertions, Mr. President—and perhaps

I should call them "assertions" rather than "arguments"; "predictions" possibly might be a still better term—were that prohibition would result in a general business depression in all lines of commercial and industrial activity; that it would result in throwing thousands of people out of work and leaving many of the store and business buildings of our large cities vacant, practically creating an atmosphere of surrounding depression that would not be at all conducive to our growth or to our well-being with tourists and travelers; that the drinking of liquor bore no relation to crime; and that there would be more crime and more arrests for crime under prohibition than under license.

To that was added the assertion that the revenues necessary for the transaction of the state's affairs and for the payment of the expenses of local administration would be largely reduced as a result of prohibition, thus requiring an increase in our rates of direct taxation in order to meet the disbursements necessary in the discharge of public business.

Whatever else may be said, Mr. President—and there were some other assertions—I think enough has occurred to justify the conviction that none of the prophesies to which I have called specific attention have materialized in practice. On the contrary, the development of the state during the year 1916 in all the elements of material and moral growth and wellbeing practically stands without precedent in our previous history.

This may be, and probably is, largely due to the prevailing prosperity, and therefore founded, of course, upon other conditions than prohibition. It may be also largely due to an indirect consequence of the war, by means of which easterners are beginning to visit and become familiar with their own country, not through preference but through necessity, because the tourist travel in the Rocky mountain region last year outdistances and outclasses all previous records, and indicates that the people of the United States will derive one unexpected benefit from the holocaust in Europe, and that is a more intimate and familiar acquaintance with the beauties, the attractions, and the wonders of their own republic.

NO BUSINESS DEPRESSION

There has been no general business depression in Colorado since prohibition went into effect; on the contrary, as I have stated, we have enjoyed more prosperity, and wider extended and more widely diffused prosperity, than we have ever known. That is verified in many ways; for example, by the weekly reports of Dun and Bradstreet on every line of business, by the bank clearings in the city of Denver, which is the metropolis of the state, and which have practically doubled, and by the unprecedented industrial activities throughout the state.

We have practically no empty stores in Denver. The places which were hitherto devoted to the liquor business have either been converted into places of legitimate amusement and recreation, where what are called "soft drinks" are sold or other lines of business have been substituted for them. After an absence of some 10 or 11 months from my home, I observed, upon re-

turning last October, that there were fewer unoccupied buildings in the business part of the city than when I left my home in November of 1915; that the crowds upon the streets seemed to have increased; that the hotel lobbies were as full, if not more full than ever, of both transients and citizens; and that the general round of activities was quite as satisfying and quite as promising as before. Of course these observations might not in themselves be convincing since the conditions might be the result of transient causes of which, as a virtual stranger, I had no knowledge.

INCREASES TOURIST TRAFFIC

Now, one of the side arguments, so to speak, or assertions which was made in the campaign of the "wets" in 1914, was that without the opportunity of purchasing stimulants of all kinds everywhere, the tourist traffic, which is very considerable in our country, would practically disappear. It was argued that unless the average visitor coming to the state could secure intoxicants at his own sweet will he would instead of coming to Colorado go elsewhere, and that, as a consequence, we would drive away from the state a very desirable influx of travelers, carrying with it the revenues which always attend upon their incursions. That has not only not been verified by events, but, as I stated a few moments ago, the tourist traffic of the state has not only doubled but has virtually quadrupled within the last 11 or 12 months, and all of the beneficial results of that character of travel have been multiplied in proportion.

Regarding the question of its effect upon the people, I may say that of those who opposed prohibition in 1914 I think I am within bounds when I affirm that 60 per cent of them would today, if the question were again presented for consideration, vote for, instead of against, prohibition. Mr. President, the prohibition wave which has swept over this country during the past few years has as its actuating cause not the moral but the material aspect of the question. Of the immorality of excesses in strong drink there never was much question; there can hardly be said to be two sides to the proposition; but the advocates of prohibition, upon humanitarian grounds, have beaten their wings against the doors of the opposition for years in the vain effort to break them down, and it was only when the materially beneficial effect of abstinence became apparent from its practical operation that a majority of the public ranged itself upon the side of prohibition.

The question was before my state a number of times before it finally succeeded. Formerly the material and practical benefit of prohibition was scarcely emphasized; or, if so, the argument did not command approval. We had, as the country remembers, and as we have occasion bitterly to regret, a widely extended industrial strike in Colorado in 1913-14. The coal camps, as they were called, were in insurrection, and the southern part of the state virtually, therefore, was in a condition of actual warfare. One of the first acts of the governor, after taking possession of the so-called infected districts, was to close all the saloons in the coal counties and to keep them closed by the strong arm of military power. Notwithstanding the industrial turmoil, which menaced law and order in every direction, the beneficial effect of that order upon the industrial classes, upon

the commercial classes, upon the women and the children in these coal camps and in the cities—I was about to say more than offset the losses and the horrors of the strike itself, but that perhaps would be going too far. It unquestionably, however, minimized them very materially, and directed the attention of the industrial interests of the state to the practical business benefits and industrial improvements consequent upon the close of the saloon. Hence the employers and the great employing companies, prompted by purely selfish business considerations of the tremendous advantages of the new over the old regime, joined the ranks of the prohibitionists, and carried their cause to success in 1915; and the local benefits so apparent in these so-called infected counties, producing this accession to the ranks of the prohibitionists, seems to have justified the application of prohibition to the entire state.

Now, I do not wish to be misunderstood. I draw a distinction between "prohibition," as the term is used, and that "dry condition," which is supposed to be its equivalent. The two things, to my mind, are entirely dissimilar. Colorado is prohibition; it is not dry; and no state will be dry or can be dry so long as prohibition laws and constitutional amendments contain exceptions, through the gates of which liquor can be introduced and consumed as a beverage; indeed, I do not believe, if those gates were wholly closed, until the appetite and characteristics of mankind shall have profoundly changed that there can be such a thing as the successful prohibition to the individual of the use of intoxicants. But the prime outstanding beneficial feature of prohibition in Colorado is the abolition of the saloon, all institution that is a curse to any community, state, and nation, particularly when it is practically without restriction, as it generally is through the political power which it always wields. It is a trap for the unwary; it leads the unthinking and the youthful into indiscretions and induces habits and companionships which are apt to prove destructive. They are an unmitigated curse in every particular to the communities where it exists. So that the abolition of the saloon, or, if you please, the driving of it from the ground floor, is an incalculable benefit wherever prohibition effects that consequence. When the saloon, if it exists at all, must take refuge behind closed doors, and in second or third stories, or in basements; it may be pernicious, but the injurious consequences of its existence are largely minimized by reason of the fact that it is no longer public and no longer immediately accessible.

SECURES PARTY INDORSEMENT

Politicians are always prone to indorse those things which seem to be successful or the indorsement of which may lead to success. This may, Mr. President, be an ambiguous compliment to the politician, but it is human nature nevertheless, and a phase of human nature, the operation of which we recognize everywhere, not excepting legislation in the senate of the United States. The fact that prohibition is practically successful in my state is perhaps emphasized as strongly as in other way by the circumstance that both the great parties in 1916, for the first time in our political history, unequivocally indorsed the proposition. They did so because an amendment to the constitution



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