

Address delivered by Mrs. Hugh Kasper, J.P., at Auckland Public Meeting on 29th March, 1942

THE ENEMY WITHIN.

The Lady Mayoress, Ladies and Gentlemen,—

This afternoon, I am going to speak on what has become a burning question. We have heard so much to-day, just at this time of crisis, about our "Home Guards" and men who are willing to protect our homes against military attack, but what about the enemies within our very midst to-day.

I believe this Enemy Number One is the Liquor Traffic and the use of alcoholic beverages, has a close relationship to so many other evils. I am glad that the women are standing four square in fighting this enemy. Women have the prerogative to challenge this enemy, strong drink, especially mothers, wives and sisters who have given their sons, husbands and brothers to fight for us and our country.

Now we are not out to fight this enemy strong drink because we do not like it, nor do we want to take any legitimate pleasure from our people, but we have evidence to prove that it militates against the best interests of the people. We know that it is an enemy of men and women and the persistent enemy of child life, and the youth of our land.

The Liquor Traffic has never been so flamboyant as it is to-day. Think of it, friends, in 1934, 10½ million gallons of strong drink was brewed in New Zealand. In 1941, 16 million gallons, and that does not include the thousands of gallons that were sent overseas to our troops, and then approximately ten million pounds was spent in the consumption of it. Is it not time that the hours of selling alcoholic beverages should be curtailed?

We are urged to prepare for an enemy who is almost at our gates and yet our men in uniform are allowed and encouraged in that which breaks down efficiency, injures the protoplasm of the cells of the body and dulls the brain.

How can we expect to win the war with numbers of our men in the fighting forces under the influence of liquor. I hope no one will think I am saying anything to disparage our men in uniform. I admire every one of them who are perhaps giving their very lives to protect us and their country, but we want the best for them—we want them to have a fighting chance, but we know that this enemy, strong drink, is a Fifth Column, breaking down their physical fitness, making them unhealthy and inefficient. Knowing the nature of alcohol, how it breaks down the resistance to evil, can we wonder that our girls and boys are acting as they never would in their normal senses. Can we wonder that the venereal disease in our fair land is on the increase and wards have to be provided for these cases.

We women are out to demand our Government to enforce the present laws. We

go further than that, to bring down war measures to curtail the sale and consumption of alcohol.

Now strong drink is not only an enemy to our war effort, but it is affecting our homes—it is striking at the root of civilisation. We know, and I speak advisedly, and you know that the use of alcohol drags men down from high places. We only have to go across the road on a Saturday night to see the men come in to the Central Mission under the influence of drink. We call them "down and outs" but those poor fellows are the victims of the terrible enemy in our midst.

Then it ruins homes, businesses and character—it sides with the enemy, disease, by hindering the development of the germicidal power in the blood by stupifying and making them less alert. It numbs the brains, put consciousness to sleep and prevents men from making quick decisions and that is so much needed now in our mechanised world.

It keeps men and women from doing the noblest things in life through its evil influence and if they continue using it, then only the Grace of God can help them. I think the greatest tragedy is that it breaks down noble womanhood and the wonderful endowment God has given every woman and that is motherhood. The poison can be transmitted from the parents to the children.

I shall never forget a sight I saw some years ago, not far from here. A woman came to me and asked if I would go into the house of her neighbour. She said, "You can do it, you are a J.P." She told me that a young married woman had gone into her house staggering under the effects of strong drink. "I do not know what has happened to the baby, it has cried and cried until it is exhausted. Will you come with me and see what has happened." When I went into the house, I found the mother lying across the bed under the influence of drink and a tiny baby a few weeks old thrown on the bed beside her. The child was hungry, but the mother, her sensibility was so numbed that she had forgotten the infant. What could we give the baby? We prepared some water and sugar and gave it to the baby to ease the pangs of hunger. It was quite awhile before that mother was restored to her normal senses. That is not an isolated case.

I went to Rotorua and I saw a Maori woman and daughter, both under the influence of drink in the train. The mother had left a child of four years old with a drunken grandmother. She went off the train and the grandmother followed. Two soldiers got up to see if that woman had got off safely. The train had started—the grandmother fell out of the train and the child on top of her. The mother went out of the train and forgot her child because of the effects of strong drink.

It keeps men and women from doing the noblest things in life and through its evil influences if they continue using it, then only (I repeat it) by the Grace of God, can they recover from that which they have lost, their self respect and everything that a woman and man holds dear.

Now don't you think we have a case against this enemy? Then what are we going to do about it? How shall we combat it? The people elected a Licensing Committee which has failed. We know that every law that has been made to control the liquor traffic has been broken.

The brewers in Auckland have set up a committee to try to clean up the traffic and we are pleased at that and thank Canon Coats for what he has done. Especially are we pleased that the cubby holes for women to drink in are to be closed. I was told to-day that they have not been entirely closed, but understand that they were to be closed. I went through 20 hotels and saw these cubby holes myself and I say it with all the force at my command, they are a disgrace to any city.

We have sent representations to the Government. Somewhere in Parliament Buildings, there are petition forms containing thousands of signatures, begging that the licensing laws be enforced, but practically nothing has been done.

We hear appeals over the air and see them in our Press for the farmer to grow more wheat and what for? We are told for bread, but we have not been promised that the thousands of tons of wheat destroyed in the making of alcoholic beverages is going to be stopped.

We housewives do not object to having our sugar rationed, but we do object to the huge quantity of it being wasted in this way, especially during a war.

What has New Zealand done to fight this enemy. Russia has practically banned the use of strong drink. Australia is bringing in rigid laws and enforcing them. In Honolulu, a few hours after Pearl Harbour was bombed, martial law was proclaimed and we are told by Mrs. Lee Cowie that it was not long before crime had fallen to a vanishing point.

I saw in an Australian paper where the women of a large organisation had sent a letter of appreciation to our beloved Queen Elizabeth, because she had banned serving wine and strong drink in Buckingham Palace.

So, ladies and gentlemen, in closing, I want to say that appeals having failed, we demand our Government to help us to fight this enemy within our midst—this enemy strong drink—as well as the enemies without.

Lloyd George during the last war said, "We have three enemies, Germany, Austria and strong drink, and the greatest of those is strong drink."

I want to emphasise this, that anything we do with regard to the control and restriction of the liquor traffic, is definitely war work and will help us to gain victory.