

The war on pubs

There are various laws against ‘entrapment’, in virtually all democracies. An example of entrapment would be an undercover police officer suggesting to a civilian that, jointly, they should burgle a house, then arresting the civilian, just before (or just after) the burglary takes place.

One of the reasons why this sort of behaviour is regarded as unethical is that it can induce civilians to carry out acts which they might otherwise have avoided. Another reason for the prohibition against entrapment is that it’s just unfair: citizens should not be set up in this way by the authorities.

Yet, in its undeclared war on pubs, the government requires the police to use entrapment in their licensing duties. The police are asked to recruit teenagers, from schools, under the legal drinking age, who are then paid to go into pubs, under police supervision, to see whether they will be served. Under legislation brought in a couple of years ago, pubs were liable to be closed down, if they fell foul of government entrapment policies on three occasions – the so-called ‘three strikes and you’re out’ law.

However, pubs have become so vigilant that companies like Wetherspoon have managed to avoid any pub closures. This is achieved by our staff repeatedly checking IDs, even for those who are considerably older than 18 – much to their annoyance.

It is evident that most sane people would find it difficult to justify the ‘three strikes’ law, since almost all parents in the land permit and prefer their children to drink in pubs, rather than at parties, in the streets or elsewhere. Indeed, all parents I have ever met, including judges, cabinet ministers and policemen themselves, started drinking in pubs, aged 15 or 16, as most are honest enough to admit.

Seemingly not content with the 50 pubs a week which are closing anyway, the mad government has decided that the ‘three strikes’ rule is not severe enough and, from this month (January 2010), has decided to change the rule to ‘two strikes’ only. Frankly, this government is to common sense what Tiger Woods is to monogamy.



The pressure which this new law will put on the licensed trade as a whole will be enormous and is completely unjustified, for the reasons set out above. No one in the country, except a few nutty politicians, believes that ludicrously draconian rules, placing the onus for underage drinking almost entirely on pubs, will solve anything. All this does is increase the pressure for pubs to close their doors for ever, as well as increasing the number of young people who drink elsewhere, where they are usually entirely unsupervised, in contrast to the good levels of supervision found in your average pub.

The government is also creating an ‘age apartheid’ system. Unlike most adults in the country, including cabinet ministers, today’s youngsters drink far more in the company of other youngsters and far less in the mixed-age groups found in pubs – and this can benefit no one.

I first had a drink in a pub, at the age of 15, with my father and grandfather; many people have had similar experiences. We’re not advocating underage drinking, but it’s spurious to suppose that the situation will be improved by excessive restrictions on this type of occurrence.

Let’s hope that this government (or another one) sees sense, before even greater damage is caused to the ancient institution of the pub – an important part of the fabric of British and Irish society.

Tim Martin
Chairman

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