

# LIQUOR QUESTION IS CAUSING MUCH DISCUSSION AMONG LOCAL CITIZENS

## Number 4

*Johnson City Staff-News, Monday Afternoon, March 31, 1927*

**This article on the local liquor proposition**, instead of dealing with a single phase of the question, will deal with two: first, the reaction of the public; second the position of the officers.

Previous articles have called attention to conditions which show that there is always a large amount of liquor in Johnson City; that the attitude of the public is passive; and that the principal intoxicant is homemade corn liquor. The object of the articles is the simple one of giving plain news as to a condition existing, and the question has been taken up because of recent **statements from prohibition headquarters in Washington, D. C. that the Appalachian region of which Johnson City is a center, is one of the notably "wet" places in the country.**

A long-time investigation shows that it is in no sense dry. Another repeat: *Keep in mind that it is as difficult to get liquor in Johnson City as in other towns and cities in this section of the south.*

Comment as to the articles recently published has been peculiar. From the anti-liquor and prohibition side comes the criticism: "It is not true; the condition does not exist, and the articles form an unjust indictment of the people of Johnson City." That is the kernel of the comment.

From the drinking and selling side comes the criticism: "Why don't you lay off that stuff – you'll have it so a fellow can't get a drink at all and then some caustic criticism from the bootlegger, **in language which a newspaper of character declines to publish.**" *Note the byline of the competing morning newspaper, The Johnson City Chronicle, was "A Newspaper of Character."*

The writer of this article finds himself surprisingly created as a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde – blowing hot and cold or wielding a two-edged sword, according to the viewpoint of the casual reader. **Of course, the truth hurts, but it seems to be pinching both feet.**

A third comment is heard – from the officers who are in closest touch with the situation: "You're exactly right – except that your figures may be too low."

On Sunday at least one minister referred in his sermon to an article appearing Saturday morning in the local press making statements which the minister claims were exaggerated, and reporting alleged conditions which do not exist. From this viewpoint the minister took occasion to condemn the police and constabulary for not doing their duty in ridding the city and county of liquor traffic. He related an incident of a woman coming to him and asking the ministers' association aid in ridding the city of a condition of drinking and carousing in a place near her home.

"Why don't you go to the police?" she was asked.

"I have been," she replied, "but they won't do anything."

No names or places were mentioned.

### **Co-incident**

Most peculiarly, the writer of this article just a few hours before the sermon referred to, was in conversation with a police officer who was telling of a recent occurrence when he was approached by a citizen with a request that the officers rid the city of a condition of drinking and carousing near his home.

"All right," said the officer. "Who is it?"

"Why, I'm not going to tell you – I'm not going to get mixed up with something like that."

"Will you swear out a warrant – and we will make the arrests and prosecute the case?"

"No S-I-R! You're not going to get me mixed up in that mess. If you'll just lay around up there all night, you can see for yourselves."

Officers patrolled the locality – with no definite information on which to work. All was quiet.

### **Another Comment**

A citizen writing in this newspaper said, "I want to add my protest to the articles appearing in the Staff-News, which appear to me to be paid liquor propaganda. It would be bad enough to publish them for pay, but it is unthinkable that they should be published as part of the daily news.

A reply was made to the letter, stating that the publishers were unable to find any article published which would call for such criticism. Almost at the same time, a casual comment was heard on the street quoting a bootlegger. "It's hard to bring the stuff in now, since that blankety-blank newspaper has been printing all them blankety-blank write-ups about liquor. We've got to be awful careful!"

### **The Police**

Going constantly, it is difficult to get an exact proportion of the calls made upon officers which produce results and those which are false alarms. The latter class form almost nine out of ten of the calls. Police and sheriffs are constantly receiving "tips" as to liquor – somewhere, indefinite – seldom any names mentioned, but always in such a way that the informer either refuses to allow his name to be used, or does his informing anonymously by letter or telephone so nobody knows who it is. When the officers start to follow the clue, in nine cases out of ten it leads into a blind alley.

Arrests and raids made by officers are frequently on tips given: and are more frequently made on search and observation on their own part, because tips are almost always unreliable, and actual specific information given by citizens is almost always negligible.

The first part of every person who sells liquor, of every person who drinks it is to **"watch for the cops."** **And they do.** With much experience, they can easily evade the officers and that's all they care for. Few who drink, few who sell or few who make it, care a rap about an average citizen knowing the facts – the average citizen won't tell; and the moonshiners and bootleggers know just exactly where the officers are all the time, and what they are doing and what they can't do.

A few years ago a series of articles was published in this paper dealing with the narcotic situation here. "Horrors!" said the good citizen. "It ain't so." "\*- - - - -\*!!!!!" said the dooper. **"You're right," said the officers.**

**Today repeat the same comments as to liquor. But remember –**

*Keep in mind that liquor is just as difficult to get in Johnson City as in other towns and cities in this section of the south.....*

**Now you tell one.**

Note: The line: *Keep in mind that liquor is just as difficult to get in Johnson City as in other towns and cities in this section of the south.....* is repeated in many articles

in the Staff-News as a sort of “inside joke” as the writer proceeds to point out the extreme degree of disregard of Prohibition laws in Johnson City (and the immediate vicinity).