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Today in History

2 December



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MCH, 2012f Nation Dates FINAL

1917 'Six o'clock swill' begins

1917 Six O'Clock swill begins

Six p.m. closing of pubs was introduced as a 'temporary' wartime measure. It ushered in what became known as the 'six o'clock swill', as patrons aimed to drink their fill before closing time. The practice lasted for the next 50 years.

Since the 1880s the campaign for the prohibition of alcohol had developed into a powerful mass movement. Supporters promoted sobriety as a 'patriotic duty' during wartime, and in 1915 and 1916 nearly 160,000 New Zealanders signed petitions calling for six o'clock closing. The government agreed to restrict opening hours so as to increase the efficiency of the workforce. In 1918 six o'clock closing was made permanent.

The liquor trade offered surprisingly little resistance. Its members felt that reducing opening hours had 'drawn some of the sting out of the wider Prohibition movement'; it was certainly preferable to a total ban. In referenda held in April 1919 and alongside the general election in December 1919, national prohibition was only narrowly defeated. The cause continued to enjoy strong support at the polls during the 1920s.

Six o'clock closing became part of the New Zealand way of life. In the short period between the end of the working day and closing time, men crowded together to drink as much beer as they could before the so-called 'supping-up' time of 15 minutes was announced. While early closing was promoted as a way of ensuring that men got home to their families at a respectable hour, some questioned their condition when they did so. New Zealand's binge drinking culture has been attributed to the fact that six o'clock closing taught generations of men to drink as fast as possible.

Six o'clock closing was decisively endorsed in a referendum in 1949. The first signs of a change in attitude appeared in the 1960s when the expanding restaurant industry questioned laws that made it difficult to sell alcohol with meals. People socialising at the local sports club or RSA also sought a change to opening hours. As the number of tourists to New Zealand increased following the arrival of jet air travel, early closing was increasingly seen as an outdated concept.

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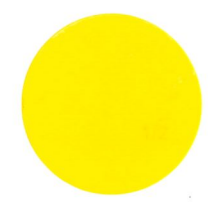
In 1966 the Licensing Control Commission stated that uniform hours of sale were 'neither equitable, enforceable, nor in the public interest'. A second national referendum in September 1967 saw nearly 64% of voters support a change to 10 p.m. closing.

Internal links

[New Zealand pub scene, 1967](#)
[Voting for prohibition](#)

External links

- [Liquor laws \(1966 encyclopaedia\)](#)
- [Six o'clock swill \(Te Ara\)](#)



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This Week in History



22 October 1972 Death of poet James K. Baxter



23 October 1915 Ten NZ nurses lost in *Marquette* sinking



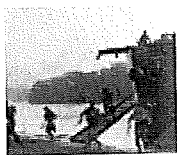
24 October 1913 Violence flares on Wellington wharves



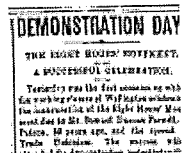
25 October 1949 Foundation of IHC



26 October 1942 Women Jurors Act allows women to sit on juries



27 October 1943 NZ troops make first opposed landing since Gallipoli



28 October 1890 First Labour Day celebrations