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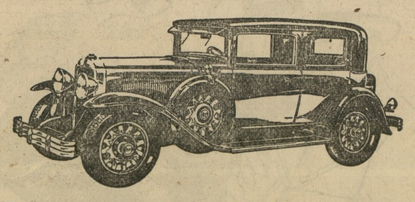

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LIQUOR QUESTION IS EXPLAINED

(From the Washington Post)

Governor Smith's speech at Milwaukee was uproariously applauded by his immediate audience and unquestionably voiced the opinions of the millions of listeners-in who take the wet side of the prohibition question. To the extent that he gained votes by making his wet proclivities more pronounced, it is reasonable to suppose that he intensified the opposition of those who hold that the country must remain dry.

Many prohibitionists agree with Governor Smith that the law is not enforced; that crime is more rampant since the Volstead act was passed; that young persons have taken to drink to an alarming degree; that police departments are corrupted by illicit liquor dealers, and that the conflict between State and Federal authority is creating chaotic conditions. Mr. Hoover's first utterance as a candidate recognized the fact that grave abuses have occurred—abuses which must be remedied."

The clear line of cleavage between the two candidates on the liquor question seems to be this: Governor Smith declares prohibition to be a failure and a breeder of crime; he would amend the eighteenth amendment to permit the States to be dry or wet, as they pleased. Mr. Hoover asserts that prohibition is an experiment in the right direction; he would remedy the abuses, study the situation with a view to making prohibition effective, and keep the eighteenth amendment intact.

Against Governor Smith's suggestion that the control of liquor be turned back to the States stands a considerable body of citizens who believe that the nation must continue the process of absorbing the powers of the States. They hold that communications have made the people one, with common interests, from Maine to California, and they would even turn over to the national Government the control of other agencies that are now controlled by the States. They insist that 48 separate State controls of the liquor traffic would bring about worse conditions than those prevailing now.

Governor Smith makes plain his understanding that he could do no more, as President, than to press upon Congress and the people the desirability of State control of liquor. Elihu Root, in a recent letter announcing that he would vote for Mr. Hoover, stated that he disagreed with Mr. Hoover's stand on prohibition, and expressed the opinion that change should be made in the law, but that it would be a long and tedious understanding. Congress is now overwhelmingly dry, reflecting the public opinion of the great majority of the States. Hence Governor Smith doubtless gives voice to what an ultimate hope, rather than an expectation of early action. He may be ten years ahead of his time in advocating State control of liquor prohibitionists no doubt believe that he is eight years behind the times—that prohibition came to stay in 1920 and that Governor Smith does not yet realize the fact.

If the election next month could bring a distinct verdict by the people on the prohibition question it would help to allay some of the bitter feeling that has been engendered, and would point the way to the next step to be taken, either toward relaxation of the law or toward its more strict enforcement. But so many other questions are involved in the campaign that it will be impossible to obtain a clear verdict on the liquor question on November 6. The next president, whether Smith or Hoover, will deal with a dry Congress that has no intention of modifying the Volstead act, much less proposing an amendment to the eighteenth amendment. Governor Smith has taken a more advanced position against prohibition than any other national figure, but if the majority of Americans were really determined to do away with prohibition they would now be striking down every dry candidate for the House and Senate. They are not doing so, but on the contrary dry Democrats as well as dry Republican candidates for Congress are in the majority.

Governor Smith was right, therefore, when he said at Omaha that prohibition was not the great issue of this campaign; and Elihu Root was right when he concluded that a change in the prohibition law was a long way off.

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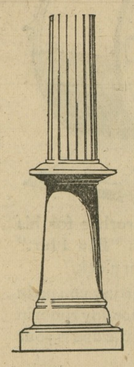

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