

Jonna Pulkkinen: Finland's Prohibition - The History of Forbidden Liquor in Finland

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Finland's Prohibition Act took effect on June 1, 1919. As a result, the production, import, sale, transport, and warehousing of alcohol was allowed only for medical, technical, or scientific purposes. Temperance activists celebrated, but they had concerns, as well: what to do with the prisons and inebriate homes that would empty out as the population went dry and crime disappeared? In principle, alcohol could not be obtained for casual consumption anywhere, neither from shops nor from restaurants.

But that was only in principle. The absolute nature of the Prohibition Act led to a massive black market for alcohol. The Prohibition Act, called "Kieltolaki" in Finnish, quickly acquired the nickname "kiertolaki," meaning "circumvention act." In truth, hardly anyone obeyed the Prohibition Act: the cities were full of speakeasies, doctor's offices issued liquor prescriptions, and many earned a living bootlegging alcohol. The police responsible for enforcing the law were corrupt, and the lawmakers themselves were no better: confiscated alcohol was brought into government cabinet meetings by the wheelbarrowful. Temperance activists' concerns about the reuse of prison buildings were quickly forgotten.

Finland's Prohibition Act was ultimately repealed as the result of an unprecedented advisory referendum, after which a state monopoly was established to control the production and sale of alcohol. The effects of the Prohibition Act have been visible in Finnish alcohol policy ever since – no matter how hard the determined Finnish people have tried to prove they know how to use alcohol wisely.

Finland's Prohibition: The History of Forbidden Liquor in Finland delves into the origins, implementation, and consequences of Finland's Prohibition Act, which was in effect from 1919 to 1932.

Contents

1. From the Early Days of Brewing to the First Prohibition Laws	11
The early days of brewing	12
Liquor begins to spread	14
Taxation of alcohol begins	16
The production of alcohol is regulated	17
Home distilling is restricted and taxed	19
A systematic alcohol policy	20
The 1733 Decree on Drunkenness	22
2. Alcohol Policy Grows Tighter	25
The Swedish Riksdag's Liquor Decree of 1800	25
Rulers change, the Liquor Decree remains	26
Brewing is deregulated	27
Alcohol consumption in the 19th century: high but under control	28

The Liquor Decree of 1866	29
Restaurant culture develops in the cities	29
Beer taxation begins	33
“Necessitated by the Northern climate”	34
Finland starts to go dry	35
3. The Rise of the Temperance Movement	37
Research on alcohol and crime	38
Women for temperance	40
Labor embraces temperance	42
The supposed Finnish tendency to drunkenness	44
Racial thought and alcohol	44
The international temperance movement	49
4. Moving toward Prohibition	51
The Prohibition Act of 1907	51
Drafting the Prohibition Act	53
Challenges to ratification	54
Alcohol restrictions during the First World War	56
The question of prohibition at the time of the Russian Revolution	61
The temperance movement at independence and during the Finnish Civil War	63
The temperance movement loses support	66
5. The Prohibition Years: 1919–1932	69
The Prohibition Act takes effect	69
Liquor substitutes become commonplace	72
Enforcement of the law	73
Insufficient resources	74
Local temperance police	76
Prohibition agents	78
Even the authorities skirt the law	80
The informant system	83
Officials are rewarded for tips, too	84
The Civil Guard and the enforcement of prohibition	85
The establishment of the State Alcohol Corporation	89
The State Alcohol Corporation faces criticism	92
More than just neutral spirits	93
Spirits from paper production waste	95
Denaturing	96
Pommac’s success story	96
The original eau de cologne – from Rajamäki	98
Restaurants and brewing during prohibition	99
Restaurants and the Prohibition Act	99
The effect of the Prohibition Act on the brewing industry	100
Organizations opposed to and in favor of prohibition	103
The Society for the Promotion of Temperance without Full Prohibition	103
The Prohibition League	105
The Women’s Temperance Center	107
The campaign against prohibition internationally	109

The position of the press	110
Penalties grow harsher	112
The golden age of smuggling	115
Estonian liquor's long history in Finland	116
The Republic of Seiskari	119
Liquor hands	123
Liquor cars	127
Liquor boats	131
Liquor horses	132
Smugglers rally in Northern Finland	133
Smuggling by rail . . .	133
. . . and via the ports	134
The liquor caravans of the north	136
The caravans elude the authorities	141
Prohibition's class divide	144
Same as it ever was	144
Social differences in drinking habits	145
The typical liquor seller: a working-class woman	146
Illegal sales in restaurants	148
Bootlegger's shops and speakeasies	150
Liquor dens	153
Private clubs	154
Warning and alarm systems	156
6. The Bottom Falls Out	161
Support for the Prohibition Act wanes	162
The public votes	166
The hurry to repeal the Prohibition Act	168
Women's work against prohibition	169
7. The Repeal of the Prohibition Act	171
A special session of parliament fast-tracks the new law	173
The national alcohol monopoly is established	175
Jaloviina cognac ushers in the new era	175
The struggle continues	176
A new legal product to combat smuggling	177
Press coverage of the repeal	178
8. From Prohibition to Alcohol Regulation	181
The purchase control system	181
Permit systems and purchase bans are discussed	183
The creation of a card system	185
Recognizing customers by sight	188
Monitoring sales and purchase bans	188
Store-specific purchase cards	191
Interventions and home visits	192

Synopsis translated by Christina Saarinen.