

Assignment 1: Objective 2

Question 2: How did prohibition change US society in the 1920s?

After prohibition became the 18th amendment to the constitution in 1919 and prohibition became a nation wide law, it is a true fact that alcohol consumption and drunkenness declined sharply. In addition, medical statistics recorded a drop in the number of treatments for diseases associated with alcoholic psychoses. However, the negative impact of the law was so large, disaster in the US society was created by the deadly law of prohibition.

Drinking became secretive and more expensive as it was against the law to sell, make or transport alcoholic drinks, but alcohol consumption didn't stop. 'Bootleggers' brought illegal liquor supplies to the cities and was sold at basement bars locked behind doors called, 'speakeasies.' One of the most famous and powerful bootleggers was Alphonse Capone who dominated the city of Chicago.

The profits from bootlegging were so great that many people were willing to risk imprisonment. To stop the trade, the Prohibition Bureau employed between 1500 to 2300 agents for the whole of USA. Nevertheless, because they were so poorly paid and few in number they were exposed to corruption. There was increasing corruption within authorities such as prohibition agents, politicians and the police. Therefore there was the difficulty of enforcement of the 18th amendment.

People viewed prohibition as an unrealistic and unworkable law thus there was the lack of public support. This was because there were many loopholes in the law itself. For example, doctors could sell alcohol for medical uses, rabbis could use alcohol for their religion and the consumption of alcohol; the law didn't really outlaw this thus many people were open to breaking the law. People were ignoring the law, in fact they were breaking the law and didn't seem to care whether they became disreputable or not. Therefore, the respect for the law was low and prohibition was not very successful especially in north eastern cities.

The illegal liquor business led to a rapid increase in organised crime and gangsters. There were huge profits in booze and gangsters were making \$2 billion a year from it. Brutal murders were planned and carried out as suppliers had increasing tension between them because of the large profit making business.

Correspondingly, gangsterism led to an increase in violence and disorder. One of the most brutal and famous example of violence caused by gangsters is the St. Valentine's Day Massacre. Al Capone featured prominently in this murder. Seven members of rival Bugs Moran gang were machine-gunned down to death by some of Capone's gangsters. However, nobody was arrested for the crime and the public was shocked people because

they were not aware of the gang warfare on such a big scale. Also, the fact the Capone's men were dressed as policemen made the crime seem even more wicked.

Producing, selling and transporting alcohol was banned nevertheless there was still a high and rising demand for alcoholic drinks. Suppliers saw the profits in this business and liquor production rose by 400%. However, breweries and saloons were shut down so there was a rapid increase in speakeasies. More people were breaking the law thus more people were criminals and there was an increase in crime. Also, the strictness of alcohol related crime were harsher thus police and other authorities had more people to arrest.

On the whole, although prohibition reduced the alcohol consumption; from 7.1 gallons per capita to even less than a gallon in 1934, and thus also reduced drunkenness, it led to disastrous results in the US society in the 1920s and 1930s.