

# Editorial

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Most of us are dreaming of a white Christmas, right? Not that we're masochistic yokels who long to suffocate in a six-foot shroud of snowy death or anything like that, but it just wouldn't seem Christmassy without at least a light dusting of the aforementioned fluffy stuff on the ground. Christmas is that sort of time, steeped in tradition. Each year we can look forward to all the trappings of the season: old, familiar carols that somehow retain their charm even after Carol Baker and world-renowned handbell choirs have run them into the ground; more fruitcakes than there are in the House of Parliament; capacity crowds in churches. For a short time the world seems a much kinder and gentler place as a spirit of generosity prevails throughout the land and all it seems anyone could wish for is a white Christmas. On PEI this year, though, we're hoping for a green Christmas. Green as in cash, moolah, the coin of the realm (sure, we no longer have currency that's actually green in color, but you catch my meaning). PEI merchants are all set to swap their jungle bells for jingling coins this year, because PEI has shoved the Christmas season further into the abyss of rampant commercialism by legalizing Sunday shopping during the holiday season.

To be fair, it's not a totally bad idea. Times are tough and shops can use any extra revenue they can lay their hands on, and people have a tendency to spend a lot of their cash during the holiday season. Why not milk it for all it's worth, especially since everybody else seems to be doing it? The tendency of Islanders to go on Sunday shopping sprees to the mainland (especially that capitalistic promised land, Moncton) has been a source of constant angst to Island merchants. The temptation to sink to that level is enormous during a heavy shopping season like Christmas, and more and more communities are doing it. Manitoba has just legalized Sunday shopping for a five-month period, citing the need to compete with its neighbour (sound familiar?). Sunday shopping is riding a wave of popularity, and PEI premier Joe Ghiz and his cohorts are content to sit back and yell, "Surf's up!"

One of the disturbing things about this is that it seems to have been not an economic plan of any sort, but instead a spineless, knee-jerk reaction to pressure from merchants by a government that seemingly has no initiative, no leadership, and no resolve whatsoever. Only a short time ago the government conducted a consultation of citizens on the subject of Sunday shopping, and the unanimous consensus reached there was that there be no expansion of Sunday shopping. The government at first legislated that, but after grumbling from the Confederation Court Mall merchants they did an about-face the very next day and amended the Retail Holidays Act to allow stores to open on Sundays during the Christmas season, and Joe Ghiz later stated

that this was what he had always wanted. If that was the case, why did he waste time and money on a public consultation, the results of which he ignored? Then again, he's on his way out anyway, so he can afford to be blissfully ignorant of the voters.

Like a lot of questionable ideas, Sunday shopping's spread depends largely on the perception that everybody else is doing it. It's a shame that PEI and other places couldn't bite the bullet and question the concept before falling in line with everyone else. It's a placebo, a quick fix, a bandage on a cancer patient. Once everybody has legalized Sunday shopping, what will the provinces do to pump up the economy? Add a new day to the week? The government would be wiser to look for ways to reduce expenses or taxation for retailers if they really want to lend them an economic helping hand in a way that would have some lasting impact, instead of tampering with our traditional day of rest, a time for family and the pursuit of religion. If the government is really interested in preserving the sanctity of that day as they once professed, it's rather odd that they'd decide to shelve it during the most important holy season of our culture, and if it progresses to the point where everyone works on Sundays who'll have time to shop apart from the wealthy anyway? It's the big chains that will be able to afford operating an extra day moreso than a lot of the smaller employers who need it, and some businesses may find themselves unwilling participants in Sunday shopping just to compete (seems to be a running theme, doesn't it?).

Sunday shopping is an unfortunate social disruption of questionable economic value concocted as a cure-all by a government that wouldn't take a stand if you paid them (which we do, come to think of it). Maybe next year they'll come up with some comprehensive economic initiative to support retailers without turning every day of the week into a shopping spree. Now that would be a real Christmas present.

Sean McQuaid,

Elfish Editor

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