



Newsletter *By Peter Clarke*

The *Keep Sunday Special Campaign* has launched a major initiative to bring the British Sunday trading laws closer in line with the rest of the EEC. The proposals retain the concept of a general restriction on Sunday trading, which exists in all EEC countries but suggest particular classes of shop which should be exempted. Thus shops such as chemists, travel kiosks, newsagents, petrol stations and small general food stores would be able to open on Sundays. So would garden centres, which at the moment are only allowed to sell certain items.

The REST Proposals for Sunday Trading

The proposals are known as the REST Proposals because each letter denotes a class of items saleable on a Sunday:

- * Recreation
- * Emergencies
- * Social Gatherings
- * Travelling public

Because these categories are broad two further tests are proposed:

- * Could the item reasonably be sold before or after Sunday?
- * Would its sale harm the special character of Sunday?

If 80% or more of a shop's goods sold passed these tests, that shop could register and trade legally on a Sunday. A retailer would register with his local authority to sell all his stock for a three year period. There would be no question that certain goods in a shop would be legal and others would not.

This means that there would be few anomalies about goods sold, and shop workers would retain protection because the bulk of current law would still be in place. It would also mean that the current law would be easier to enforce.

Keep Sunday Special is backed by the Co-operative Union, the National Chamber of Trade, the Alliance of Independent Retailers, USDAW and the major churches.

For more information contact: Keep Sunday Special, The Jubilee Centre, 3 Hooper Street, Cambridge CB1 2NZ.

The Deregulators

A well funded, well oiled and seductive campaign is now swinging into action to promote the virtues of a shopping hours free for all. Those supporting total deregulation of shopping hours are keen to ensure that this time round they learn from their mistakes. Following a conference of over 150 companies at the Grosvenor House Hotel in February 1988, a group of major retailers have donated £4.5 million to set up a pro-Sunday trading lobby called The Shopping Hours Reform Council.

This P.R. effort is being headed by Sir Basil Feldman, formerly a vice-chairman of the Conservative Party, and directed by Roger Boaden, with eighteen years experience at Tory Central Office. Also involved is Tim Bell, the founder of Saatchi and Saatchi.

“Many major retailers, the National Farmers Union, tourist interests and manufacturers support the Council,” Roger Boaden told me. “It is not a secret who they are but we are not in a position to name them. We are still finalising the list.”

“The National Farmers Union are backing us because already many farm workers work on Sundays. They are also worried about the position of farm shops and horticulture.”

Full Sunday Morning or Afternoon Opening?

Whilst the Shopping Hours Reform Council are stressing that it is not just Sunday trading that they are concerned with, they admit that Sunday is the real battle ground. This where the most money is at stake. There is little financial gain in an extra hour or two of opening on weekday evenings.

The Council are preparing for a long battle. Their aim is to prepare the ground for legislation in the 1989/90 session of Parliament. So the first task has been to visit each of the Party conferences to put over their case. “We believe the government is unlikely to go for total deregulation again. That was clearly defeated last time,” Roger Boaden said, “That is why we are looking for a

sensible compromise. We are currently consulting our supporters about their favoured option, perhaps full Sunday afternoon or Sunday morning opening.”

The government are not directly involved with the campaign, though the Tory Party Manifesto at the 1987 General Election declared: “the present laws on Sunday trading and licensing contain innumerable anomalies. We will look for an acceptable way forward to bring sense and consistency to the law on Sunday trading.”

C.W.S. Farm Park

We know that the CWS Farms Group is the biggest farmer in the country, with 38,000 acres. It is Europe’s biggest dairy farmer and has substantial interests in arable farming. In fact it is involved with every sector of agriculture except pigs and poultry. Only a few years ago the Farms Group hit the national headlines when it announced that it was banning fox hunting on its land.

Two new developments have now been announced. Firstly, 150 acres is being developed at its Leicestershire headquarters as a Farm Park. This is a new leisure concept, which will include a model dairy, aimed at those who want to find out more about agriculture and especially school parties. The development will be open in the spring.

The Farm Group has also announced a second non-agricultural venture. It is to develop five golf courses on land which is no longer required for farming. The CWS is working with the *Professional Golfers Association*, and the building group Sir Alfred McAlpine. The first development is likely to be on its estate in Cheshire.

For more information on the Farm Park, contact, CWS Farm Group, Gaulby Lane, Stoughton, Leicestershire.

Citygrove Properties

An unusual visitor to the Labour party Conference was London based property group Citygrove Properties. “In four years Citygrove has become a major developer of edge of town retail and leisure space developing 2.5 million square feet,” its glossy handout told delegates. It is involved with developments at Havant, Northampton, Telford, Swansea, Kings Lynn, Cannock, Chelmsford and Staples Corner at the London end of the M1.

Why did they go to the Labour Party Conference? I put this question to Simon Commercial of Citygrove. “We specialise in creating out of town retail parks. They come in for a lot of flak, so we have come to the heart of that flak to show people what it’s really like. The most common complaint is that retail parks

make pots of money for the developers. But they are developing land which would otherwise be derelict and they are creating lots of jobs."

But what about city centres? Aren't city centres and small neighbourhood shops being hit by out of town developments? "Our developments enhance city centres because city and town centres were never designed for the sort of developments we include. For example, the large scale DIY stores. With greater disposable income, greater leisure and greater car ownership the two are complementary."

Developing the Waste Spaces

"As a matter of commercial policy we will not touch green belt land. And we are keen to work in the inner cities. Recently we contacted every London Borough Council. It is to their advantage to develop the large waste spaces that blight the inner cities."

How are they trying to convince delegates? Bicos and carrier bags were common temptations on other stands. "We are out to convince people by arguments, by listening to the flak and showing people what a retail park really involves."

Why were they the only property company to exhibit at the Labour Party Conference? Was it because Labour now held a record number of local government seats? "Maybe because we are more far-sighted than our competitors. The last thing we want is to go to appeal on a planning application." So Citygrove never appeal? "We do appeal if we are unhappy about the grounds on which we have been turned down. If the appeal is upheld it shows we were only obtaining justice."

Credit Unions and Poverty

Despite feeling very nervous at the Social Services Conference in Newcastle, Mrs Mary Owen, of Cowgate Credit Union, Newcastle, spoke with an eloquence which won the support of the audience of social work professionals and politicians. She was at the Conference to give a client's perspective to a debate about tackling poverty.

Cowgate Credit Union takes its name from the Cowgate estate in north west Newcastle. It is an older estate of about 1,000 houses. "There are problems with the housing and there is 90% unemployment.

"There are loads of people on Council estates who are in the hands of money lenders. I know, I was one of them. People were getting into debt just to pay the electricity bills. Money lenders would take the Child Benefit books as

security and stand outside the Post Office to get their money before any of the family's needs were looked at," Mary told the conference.

"Then, in 1985, with the help of the local Citizens Advice Bureau, and Newcastle City Council Social Services, we set up a credit union. We started in one room at the neighbourhood centre, with 95 members. Today we have 233 members and we have lent out over £30,000."

For and Against

Jeff Finister, Principal Welfare Rights worker in Newcastle said that things are going to get worse with the introduction of Social Fund Loans. "They are interest free loans but people find that they have to repay the loan over a very short period of time and that they are better off taking an interest bearing loan from a money lender. We have had examples of Social Fund loans being deducted at the rate of 15% to 20% of a family's weekly benefit. Credit unions have a big role to play in helping people on benefits plan their borrowing and savings."

A minority at the conference were unimpressed. Speaking for this minority was Cllr Nick Nolan, Chair of Social Services in Coventry who said, "We are just mucking about suggesting people should set up credit unions." Instead people should be told the truth about the Tory government. "Thatcher has to be defeated, that's the only thing we should be concerned with."

Mary Owen had her own answer to this. "Have you asked what people want? You're not going to push me to one side," she responded. "Credit unions helped me and they can help many others".

A Journey into Space

What is it? A new community centre perhaps, a fantasy world, a model utopia? A journey into space?

"On Saturday 27 November 1987 we had 250 coach trips arriving here. They come from as far as Lincoln and Fort William, and we regularly get them from Sheffield and Edinburgh."

The Centre has its own community room, and Industrial Chaplain, the Revd John Hamsley. He reports direct to the landlords on the social well being of the project. "He is well known to the staff and the day may soon come when the Centre has its own chapel. All the security staff are here to help the public.

There is also a huge children's fun fair, an amusement arcade full of slot machines, and cinema . . .

No, it's the Gateshead MetroCentre, "Europe's largest shopping centre."

The Metro Centre

It is impossible to be in the north east, and have an interest in retailing, and not visit the MetroCentre in Gateshead. It is not easy to get there from the centre of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, but Co-operators can take no comfort from that. If there is a plot, it is probably designed to protect the Eldon Square shopping centre. Despite the name, the Tyneside Metro system doesn't go there but there is a brand new British Rail station, opened earlier in 1988. I was however, the only person on the train who got off there. Most seem to travel by car, parking in the acres of car park; the Centre is adjacent to the dual carriage-way ring round around the Tyneside conurbation.

The Centre was built on power station ash in "one of the country's first enterprise zones". This meant a 100% government grant towards the capital cost of the building work. It also means "rate free status until 1991". These subsidies "helped make the MetroCentre economically viable" say the management agents for the Church Commissioners who are the landlords.

1.3 million people are within a 20 minute drive; 3 million within 1 hour's drive. 300,000 people visit the Centre each week, 17 million will have visited in the whole of 1988. "All of them come to buy. People in the north east are very good spenders. When they have money they spend it," I was told at the information desk. "For example, when the shipyards closed it was the redundancy money which was being spent here. If the family couldn't afford a video, or the micro-wave before, they had them then."

Full Range of Retail Units

There are over 260 retail units at the 2.3 million square foot centre, ranging from Marks and Spencer and Carrefour to barrows dotted in the wide boulevards, giving an impression of a street market. "97% of units are let," I was told.

If the MetroCentre is to be believed, shopping is now not only a leisure activity but the earthly representation of a fantasy world. That is the impression created by the chrome, smoked glass, soft lighting and pastel plastics of the potent new store designs and even formats which the large multiples have chosen to implement at the Centre.

Walking towards the station, I saw two old ladies sitting in their best coats on a park bench in one of the piazzas eating ice cream. I blinked and saw it for what it was, two old ladies sitting on a heap of power station ash eating ice cream on a dark north eastern Thursday night. It is a long way from the company shop of the nineteenth century. But it is a reality and, I fear, ever more typical of our current culture.

Fellow co-operators! We have to revise our thinking.

The Author

Dr. PETER CLARKE is Research Officer of the Co-operative Party. He is a Tottenham Councillor, a member of the Committee of Co-ops for Labour and Chair of ICOM's Public Affairs Committee. He is an authority on closer relations among the Co-operative sectors and on the Co-operative Movement's relationship with Government. His published work includes studies of the development of new Co-operatives and of Land Settlement Schemes for the unemployed in the 1930's.