

'A matter of choice' Fitzgerald argues

ST. CATHARINES (Staff) — Striking the Retail Business Holidays Act from the books is the only way to guarantee fairness to all Ontarians, says Wellander Barry Fitzgerald.

The Atlas Steels worker, appearing before an all-party select committee which held hearings on Sunday shopping yesterday in St. Catharines, said current legislation — even under proposed amendments — is unfair.



"The majority of people don't care one way or another about this issue," said Fitzgerald, a member of the Ontario Freedom Party. "We believe it's an individual decision, and the government should not try to make it for you."

**Fitzgerald...
personal choice**

The Retail Business Holidays Act doesn't treat everyone equally, he said, noting many religions observe the Sabbath on days other than Sunday. Moslems, for instance, observe it from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday.

"We are imposing a day of rest on all religions whether they want it or not."

Fitzgerald also questioned claims by opponents of wide-open Sunday shopping that it would tear the family fabric.

"I have yet to hear anyone claim that their family fell apart solely because one member of the family had to work Sunday."

He said the Employment Standards Act already stipulates the number of hours employees work in a week, so further legislation is not necessary.

"The only answer is to give the choice to the individual."

But some members of the committee, made up of seven Liberal, two Conservative and two New Democratic MPPs, took Fitzgerald to task for his views.

"You've got a real strange notion of freedom, sir," Etobicoke-Rexdale NDP member Ed Philips told Fitzgerald.

Mike Farnan, NDP member for Cambridge, also disagreed with Fitzgerald's stand.

"Freedom is an inter-related concept; one person's freedom is an imposition on another person," he said, adding that employers would find loopholes in legislation guaranteeing employees would not have to do "undesirable" Sunday work.

"I think you live in an unrealistic world," he told Fitzgerald.

Regional Coun. Mike Collins, an outspoken opponent of Sunday shopping, said the existing retail law would be effective in "maintaining the quality of life" associated with having Sundays off if a few minor variations were made in the legislation.

Collins wants bona fide Sunday openings recognized — where businesses close Saturdays for religious reasons — and he wants changes made in the legislation to close some of the loopholes, such as supermarkets "disguising themselves as drug stores."

He also called for stiffer fines for those defying the retail act, and for the approving of all future tourism exemptions by the province.