

Grocers, retailers open this Sunday



TWO VIEWS: Premier Bob Rae, left, announces vote on Sunday shopping in Legislature yesterday as ex-cabinet minister Peter Kormos reacts glumly.

'People want to shop,' Premier tells MPPs

Within hours of Premier Bob Rae giving the green light to Sunday shopping, some of Ontario's major retailers and grocery chains yesterday announced plans to open this Sunday.

"Experience and a change in public attitudes in recent years have combined to persuade me that such legislation, however well-intended, is extremely difficult to enforce fairly," Rae told the Legislature.

"And (it) runs up against a growing sense that many people want to shop on Sunday and are increasingly impatient of rules and regulations that prevent them from doing so."

The Retail Business Holidays Act now prohibits most stores from opening on Sundays and statutory holidays unless they per-

Unions bitter, stores thrilled/A12
Angry Kormos vows fight/A12
The Star's view/A24

form a tourism function. Amendments introduced yesterday would repeal the Sunday ban, but stores would continue to close on statutory holidays, including Easter Sunday, Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

House Leader Dave Cooke said a free vote of MPPs on the amendments could be held as early as next Thursday if all parties agree.

Meanwhile the government says it will

not prosecute any Sunday shopping charges that are laid between yesterday and the vote — paving the way for stores to open this weekend.

"As far as we are concerned, the bill takes effect from this point on," Rae told reporters outside the Legislature.

The change comes one month after a Star poll found 67 per cent of adult Ontarians — and 79 per cent of those living in Metro — support wide-open Sunday shopping.

It also comes a mere six months after the Legislature passed a law that was designed to restrict Sunday shopping to strictly defined tourism areas.

"This has not been an easy decision. I

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have often stood in my place on both sides of the House to argue in defence of a common pause day on Sunday," Rae told the Legislature.

"I can only say that this government, like all governments, has to govern with the public interest in mind, and that public policy in this area has to respond to a changing public attitude."

Major retailers, who had mounted an intensive campaign for wide-open shopping, immediately hopped on the bandwagon.

"The doors of the Eaton Centre will be open and I'm sure some of the stores will be, too," said John Bullock, president of Cadillac Fairview Corp. Ltd., the centre's major landlord.

"It will just be a matter of seeing if they can muster the staff to open up . . . but we will do everything we can to facilitate anyone who wants to open."

A spokesperson for Eaton's itself, however, did not know yesterday whether the chain's stores would be open.

Sears Canada will have 42 of its Ontario department stores open, company official Ross Rigney said.

And most of the province's major grocery stores will be open, officials for the chains say.

"This Sunday we will open as many of our stores as we can," said Bill Sheine of the giant A & P, Dominion and Miracle Food Mart grocery chains.

"We have 260 stores across the province, and as many of them as we can open, we will," he said.

The Oshawa Food Group Ltd. will open most of its 75 grocery stores, which include Food City, Price Chopper and Dutch Boy outlets.

Loeb and Loeb IGA stores also will be open, the company announced in a release.

Labor groups and some small retailers were angry that Rae turned his back on long-standing New Democratic Party policy, which calls for a common pause day for retail workers.

"The government is wrong on this one," Ontario Federation of Labor president Gord Wilson said.

The executive director of an anti-Sunday shopping coalition said he was shocked.

"I had never expected Bob Rae to change his mind on this basic an issue so quickly and so radically," said Gerald Vandezande of Fairness for Families. "All at once, I think the NDP government has lost its social conscience."

The president of the Community-Based Council Against Sunday Shop-

ping warned that hundreds of corner-store owners will be forced out of business when grocery chains open Sundays.

"I don't know how he (Rae) could just turn away like that," Chong Tae Kim told reporters. "This is just a complete betrayal."

"We're just really appalled at what they've done," said Tim Catherwood of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union.

"He's done a 180-degree turn, totally breaking his promise. He's betrayed us for no good reason."

Retail workers had argued for greater job concessions, including double pay, 48 continuous hours of time off and tougher laws to stop employers who covertly punish workers who refuse Sunday work.

But yesterday Rae made it clear he thinks the current law giving workers the absolute right to refuse Sunday shifts is sufficient.

However, Rae did set up a "special committee" to make recommendations on steps that can be taken to protect retail workers and shop owners "adversely affected."

Another amendment introduced yesterday would permit retailers with commercial leases to remain closed, regard-

less of the terms of their contract.

This means, for example, that individual shops in malls could refuse to open with the other stores.

Early predictions are the bill will pass easily with a majority from each of the three parties voting in favor despite pockets of angry protest, especially within the NDP and led by maverick MPP Peter Kormos.

If passed, the law is retroactive to yesterday, meaning shopping will be legal this Sunday, Attorney-General Howard Hampton said.

As for merchants who were charged before yesterday, Hampton said senior crown officials will review the cases in the next couple of days to determine which should proceed.

Rae said his government decided its shopping restrictions could not be enforced effectively, particularly after the Ontario Municipal Board ruled all of downtown Windsor qualified as a tourism area.

"You have to recognize the culture of the province has changed, the economic life of the province has changed, and opinion and attitudes have definitely changed," Rae told reporters yesterday.

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