

# Never on a Sunday

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**The Shops Bill was killed by Tory back-benchers in the House of Commons on 14 April. So ends that attempt to allow all shops to open on Sundays.**

Since much of the opposition to the Shops Bill came from Christian Sabbatarians, it is appropriate to investigate the link between Christianity and Sunday. It commenced in 321 when the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great ordered that "the venerable day of Sol (the Sun)" be a public holiday, thus instituting a seven-day week in place of the existing eight-day one. He was (and remained until his death-bed baptism in 337) a worshipper of Sol Invictus, the Sun-god, and was Pontifex Maximus (Chief Priest). His decree was therefore made to honour that God, not the Christian one.

The Christians had celebrated the Lord's Day on Saturday (Saturn's Day), which coincided with the Jewish Sabbath (but was not a Roman holiday). When Sunday became an official holiday they made that their day of worship instead. It was merely a matter of convenience, so that their day of worship would be on a holiday.

When the Roman Emperor Theodosius I made Christianity the official religion in 392, the Christians tried to replace the name Sunday with the title "Lord's Day". In the Mediterranean provinces the new name was adopted, viz: Domenica (Italian), Domingo (Spanish and Portuguese), Dimanche (French) and Kiriakey (Greek). In the less Christian northern provinces the old name Sunday, Sontag, etc survived amongst the pagans (ie rustics).

Similarly, the Christian Church tried to replace the pagan planetary names of the other weekdays with numerical terms based on the Lord's Day as first in the week. This succeeded only in the Greek-speaking

East and in Portugal. In Greece Monday is called Theftera (second day), Tuesday is Treaty (third day), Wednesday is Tetarti (fourth day), Thursday is Pempti (fifth day), Friday is Paraskayvee (preparation day) and Saturday is Savato (Sabbath). Similarly in Portugal the weekdays are Segunda Feira (Monday), Terca Feira (Tuesday), Quarta Feira (Wednesday), Quinta Feira (Thursday), Sexta Feira (Friday) and Sabado, ie Sabbath (Saturday).

The months, however, retained their pagan names: January after Janus, the god of doors, February after the Februa (purification) of the the festival of Lupercalia, March after Mars, the god of war, and May after Maia, goddess of growth.

The bigots who stopped the Sunday Bill's progress to the Statute Book were therefore protecting a law based on Constantine's prohibition of Sunday labour (except where necessary on farms) to honour the Sun God, more than 16 centuries ago.

English Sabbatarian legislation started in earnest during the Puritan era with the Sunday Observance Act 1625 which severely restricted business and entertainments on Sundays. Further Sunday Observances Acts followed in 1677 and 1780. Finally came the Sunday Entertainments Act 1932, Shops (Sunday Trading Restriction) Act 1936, the Retail Meat Dealers' Shops (Sunday Closing) Act 1936, the Shops Act 1950 and the Cinemas Act 1985.

Part four of the Shops Act 1950 deals with Sunday trading. It stipulates that every shop, save as otherwise provided, must be closed on Sunday. Under Section 53, Jewish shop owners can apply to the local authority for permission to close on Saturday instead. Contraventions of the prohibitions on Sunday opening are punishable by a fine. The purposes for which a shop may open in England and Wales on Sunday are set out in the fifth schedule to the Act.

The goods which a shop may legally sell in England and Wales on Sunday are as follows: intoxicating liquors; take-away food; confectionery and ice cream; flowers, fruit and vegetables; milk and cream, not including tinned and dried milk or cream but including clotted cream where sold in tins or otherwise; medical and surgical appliances, but only at premises registered under Section 12 of the Pharmacy and Poisons Act 1933; aircraft, motor cycle supplies and accessories; tobacco and smokers' requisites; newspapers, periodicals and magazines; books and stationery from bookstalls at, and only at, terminal and main line railway or omnibus stations or at such aerodromes as are approved by the Secretary of State; guide books, postcards, photo-

graphs, reproductions, photographic films and plates and souvenirs but only at Art Galleries, Museums, Gardens, parks, or ancient monuments, or at zoological, botanical or horticultural gardens; photographs for passports; requisites for any game or sport at premises where such games or sport is played; fodder for horses, mules, ponies or donkeys at any farm, stables, hotel or inn; transaction of Post Office business; transaction of the business carried on by a funeral undertaker.

The law is illogical, usually honoured in the breach. In March, at the General Synod of the Church of England, it was pointed out that the gift shop in Canterbury Cathedral was breaking the law. The Archbishop thereupon ordered its closure!