

RETAIL TRADING HOURS

918. Mr I.M. BRITZA to the Premier:

When the matter of retail trading came up earlier this year, I took the time to consult with many of my constituents concerning this matter, and I found widespread support for extended retail shopping. I am convinced that this support extends throughout the metropolitan area, particularly among working parents who want the flexibility to shop after work in places like the Galleria in Morley. Does the Premier have any good news for me that I can take back to my constituents?

Mr C.J. BARNETT replied:

I had a good start to the day. I got up, walked the dogs and it rained. I was about to eat my Weeties when I heard on ABC radio Mr John Cummings of the Independent Grocers Association demanding that he have urgent discussions with the government about retail trading hours, the impression being that somehow the IGA had been ignored.

In response to the question, in February and March this year I had in my office a series of meetings.

The SPEAKER: Member for Kwinana and member for Kimberley, you may have important business that you wish to conduct. I would prefer that you did it either outside or far more silently than you are doing at the moment. I would like to hear the Premier, and I expect everyone in this place to respect the answers being given whether they want to hear them or not.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: At the time of the last election, the Liberal Party made it quite clear that if we succeeded in that election, we would consult with the industry with a view to making a significant increase in the hours of weeknight shopping. I kept my word and I met with not only Mr Cummings—indeed, the Minister for Commerce has also met with Mr Cummings—but also the following groups: Anchor Foods, the City of Perth, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia, Coles, David Jones, Mrs Mac's, Myer, the Retail Traders' Association, the shop assistants' trade union, the Shopping Centre Council, Wesfarmers, Woolworths, the Independent Retailers Association, the Australian Newsagents' Federation, the Pharmacy Guild of Australia, the WA Independent Grocers Association, the Western Australian Retailers Association and the Western Australian Council of Social Service.

Mr M.P. Murray: What about the National Party?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: And I did meet with Joe Bullock!

Therefore, we did what I said in the election campaign we would do. The majority of those groups favoured an increase in weeknight shopping hours. The approach that I and the Liberal Party are taking to this issue is to have discrete but progressive deregulation of trading hours to accommodate the changes in the workforce patterns and to accommodate the needs of working couples, families with children, and people who have two jobs and who have to commute—for all the right reasons. Our approach recognises that people in their twenties, thirties and forties probably work harder and longer hours than the generations before them. We wanted to accommodate them and accept the reality of modern life. Therefore, we were not talking about Sunday trading. I made it very clear in the election campaign that we were simply looking at a modest increase in weeknight trading hours. I had in my mind eight o'clock, and the result of the consultation was overwhelmingly for weeknight trading hours to be extended until nine o'clock for consistency. We accepted that and we brought in legislation to that effect.

I remind members opposite that they lost the election. They need to get it into their heads that they lost!

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Armadale!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Members opposite lost the election! The Liberal Party won 10 seats from Labor.

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Armadale, I am sure you have heard what I have said to several people in this place today—that is, there are other ways of contributing and advancing question time. I formally call you for the first time.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The Liberal Party won 10 seats —

Mr M.P. Whitely interjected.

The SPEAKER: Likewise, member for Bassendean, I formally call you for the first time.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The Liberal Party won 10 seats from Labor; nine of those seats were in the metropolitan area. One issue that was prominent in the election campaign was trading hours. We had a position on that issue. Members opposite lost the election. Can they not get it into their heads that once they lost the election, they went from this side of the chamber to the other side? Can they not get it into their heads that all their policies and ideas are redundant? Members opposite are not in government. People voted for the Liberal Party and we formed government with our friends the Nationals. They lost! Members opposite will never make any progress in opposition until they accept the bleeding obvious—they lost!

Several members interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: They lost 10 seats, one of the biggest swings of seats in the state's history.

We did what we said we would do and we brought in legislation for extended trading hours in Perth. This is not an issue that affects country people; it is an issue for Perth—the opposition's constituents and our constituents. After introducing the legislation, hoping and believing that the Labor Party would support it, I then —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members, I would like to get through a few more questions. People on both sides of this place are not aiding that process. I know that people to my left would like the opportunity to ask more questions. I would like to provide them with more opportunities, but incessant interjecting is not going to enable that.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Mr Cummings was on ABC Radio this morning talking about the plight of small business. Is Mr Cummings representative of small business? I do not think so. He is in partnership in three major shops. He has hundreds of employees on his payroll. He is not a typical small business person. Indeed, most of the IGA stores are large businesses, with millions and millions of dollars in turnover. They are not struggling small businesses. Many of them provide a limited range of services and a limited range of products. The one thing they often have in common is high prices. These stores are restricting the choices of consumers. They are restricting the choices of other retailers. Who is paying for that? The people who are paying for this are often lower income people, often in outer suburban areas, who have large mortgages and have kids to raise. These are the people who are paying the price. Many of these people live in the electorates of members opposite.

My day got worse, because I then read in the *Australian Financial Review* that the Leader of the Opposition is complaining that he has not been consulted! Hang on. I seem to remember writing to the Leader of the Opposition on 24 September. I will read a couple of paragraphs from the letter. I started by saying —

Dear Eric —

I started on a friendly note—Dear Eric!

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, members!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I went on to say in the letter —

The extension to weeknight trading hours is a moderate step that will give people the choice and convenience to shop after work. It takes account of changes in urban lifestyles and working hours, particularly for young families and working people.

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, member for Armadale!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The letter continues —

An extension to 9.00 pm is preferable, both in terms of giving people in the metropolitan area an appropriate opportunity to shop on weeknights and to provide consistency with the existing 9.00 pm closure for general retail shops on Thursday evenings.

However, in order to progress this issue in a constructive manner and meet the considerable demand in the community for some change to weeknight shopping hours, the Liberal Party would be willing to discuss an extension to 8.00 pm.

That was two months ago. Have I received a reply?

Several members interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: No! No reply!

Mr T.G. Stephens interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! This question has taken far too long—far too long—because of interjections from people to my left. Some of the people to my left might, I presume, be referring to another member in this place in the question that they are asking. Member for Pilbara, you might like to reconsider the question that you are interjecting with, and I formally call you for the first time.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I have not received a reply to that letter. What is happening now? The government has acted. Yesterday, the Minister for Commerce tabled a map showing the expansion of the Perth retail tourism precinct area. That is totally appropriate and has merit in its own right. It will just make for a larger inner-city area. As we indicated six months ago, we are moving to, and have introduced legislation for, a tourism precinct in Joondalup.

Mr E.S. Ripper interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, Leader of the Opposition!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The Jekyll and Hyde member for Joondalup now supports it, having opposed it, as was pointed out yesterday.

Point of Order

Mr M. McGOWAN: Mr Speaker, I would ask that the Premier withdraw that accusation against the member for Joondalup. Quite obviously, if we think about the individuals whom the Premier was referring to, it is unparliamentary.

The SPEAKER: Order! I am not going to take it as a point of order, member. The Premier.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr C.J. BARNETT: We have these changes in position. What is happening now? What is the next scenario? We will create a tourism precinct in Joondalup. We are expanding the boundaries of the City of Perth area. We are looking favourably, through separate legislation, at Midland. We will consider Armadale. But, as the member for Morley raises in his question, what about Morley Galleria? What about Garden City at Booragoon? What about Westfield? What about Cockburn Central? That is what is going to happen. One by one, major shopping centres —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! Premier, I hope you are going to conclude these remarks rather rapidly, because there will soon not be anybody to my left who will be able to look down a list and say they have not been called. Leader of the Opposition, I formally call you for the first time.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: What is happening is not what this government intended. We are now going to get shopping centres coming to us one by one, with the support of the local authority. Indeed, when that occurs in the vicinity of the electorates of members opposite, they will, as the member for Joondalup did, say, “I’ve changed my mind; I actually support it in Cockburn”, or, “I support it in the eastern suburbs”, or, “I support it south of the river; it’s a good idea”. That is what is going to happen. What will that mean? It will mean that not only will we get what the Liberal Party went to the election on—that is, a significant increase in weeknight shopping hours—but we will get, by default, Sunday trading, on a discriminatory basis, across the metropolitan area. That is not orderly deregulation. That is not what I want. That is not what this government wants. Again, I say to members opposite, “For goodness sake, recognise that you lost the election, recognise that the Liberal Party won 10 seats from you, and agree to, if not nine o’clock, at least eight o’clock, so that we can have orderly deregulation”. I urge members of the Labor Party to agree to that, so that their constituents and our constituents can have what so many people will now have in Joondalup, and what so many people now have in country areas. If members of the Labor Party continue down this path, they will pay a price. They will see shopping centre after shopping centre deregulated; they will have arguments in their electorates between those against and those for; and they will have squandered the opportunity to play any role at all in retail trading policy in Western Australia.