



DEPUTY

Government Chief Whip

12 Downing Street, London SW1

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CNO  
For Cabinet folder

22nd January 1985

Dear Leon,

## SHOP HOURS AND SUNDAY TRADING

When the Auld Committee Report recommending the abolition of restrictions on Shop Opening hours and on Sunday Trading was discussed at 'H' Committee I had to tell the Committee that I could not guarantee that we could carry through the House of Commons the proposed Bill to implement the Report. I thought it would be helpful to let you have some further information on this point before further discussion takes place.

The last time the issue came before the House was the Second Reading of Ray Whitney's Shops Bill on Friday 4 February 1983. The Bill sought to remove all restrictions on Sunday shopping and on shop hours. It was defeated by 108 votes to 207.

	For the Bill		Against the Bill	
	Still MPs	Left the House	Still MPs	Left the House
Conservative	80	17	39	1
Labour	1	3	109	45
Liberal	1	-	3	1
SDP	-	5	2	-
Other	1	-	7	-
TOTAL	108		207	

I think that we can take it that almost all the Labour Party will be against the Bill for union (USDAW) reasons. If they were all against it, the other Opposition parties divide about half and half and all MPs were present, we would need to have less than 94 of our 394 members voting against the Bill to win:

	For	Against
Conservative	301	93
Labour	-	207
Other	22	22
	323	322



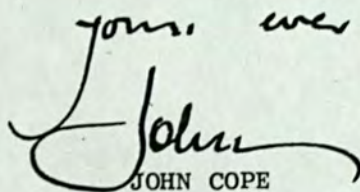
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In other words, on these assumptions we need three quarters of our people supporting the Bill, whereas two thirds of the Conservatives now in the House who voted in 1983 supported the proposals then.

The present Parliament has 154 new members whose opinions are less easy to gauge but our soundings indicate that among our supporters there is a stronger current in favour of legislation than among members who have been here longer. It is however impossible to be sure what effect the Auld Report and subsequent expressions of public opinion will have on members and what effect the various lobbies, who are now limbering up, will have, particularly on the new members. The lobbies include some strong commercial interests in favour, as well as some small businesses. Against the Bill are the churches, the shop workers' union and, I believe, the bulk of small retail businesses who believe they would suffer at the hands of large stores, who would be able to operate shift work and would be freed of the parking and traffic problems of weekdays in the cities.

I personally voted for Ray Whitney's Bill and would do so again. If the assumptions on which I have been basing my views are correct then the outcome of a Government sponsored Bill on a free vote must be uncertain. The debate will probably turn on abolition of restrictions versus reform rather than abolition versus the status quo and if this is so this will make difficulties for our supporters whose attitude to the proposals is lukewarm. There will be great pressure to allow a free vote, even for Ministers, because of the religious implications for Sunday work and the traditional day of rest. To whip the Bill would be to invest a considerable amount of the Government's goodwill on the issue.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, other Members of Cabinet and Sir Robert Armstrong.

*Yours, we*  
  
JOHN COPE

Deputy Chief Whip

Rt Hon Leon Brittan QC MP  
Home Secretary



23 JAN 1985

