

# The Times They Are a-Changin'

By Tim Banks

**Y**ou just have to love PEI. It's a province "steeped in change". And when I talk about change, I'm talking about serious life-altering changes.

PEI is officially the last province to introduce year-round Sunday shopping. It wasn't easy. In fact, if you asked our politicians they would say it was the most dramatic thing to pass through the legislature this session.

I have to re-tell an experience I had a few years ago. I'm sitting in a typical Island farm kitchen, with the obligatory statue of Jesus hanging on the wall, reading *The Guardian* when I stumble upon an article which mentions that some Archbishop has decided that Catholics may eat meat on Fridays. Excited about this, I mention to my 90 year-old-relative that she's free to eat what she pleases on Fridays. Before she could get the "Well, I don't know, dear" out of her mouth, her son piped up: "If Christ came down off that cross and served it up to her, she'd not take a bite."

I could have argued that it was a fact, since it was printed in *The Guardian*, but that wouldn't have passed the Protestant Litmus test so it's still fishcakes on Fridays here.

While the rest of you were dealing with the troubles of the Irish economy and bombings in Korea, our legislature focused entirely on Sunday shopping. The media were at the top of their game, combining their arsenal towards covering the most important issue since allowing canned pop on the Island. Forget that there was already three years of political wrangling to let Island stores open Sundays from May until Christmas – this bill called for complete change. What shaped up might be up there with the Treaty of Versailles.

Here's how it played out: the Tory Leader of the Opposition brought forward a Private Member's Bill amending the *Retail Business Holidays Act* and the media gleefully went door-to-door, soliciting opinions from the public. Never mind that just a year earlier a full Legislative Committee had brought forward a recommendation to government to keep the stores open... which they didn't follow.

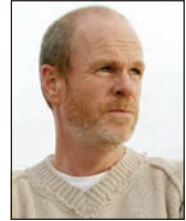
The name calling and banter started rising from the floor of the House. The government pitted rural against urban and religion against business. Finally, a breakthrough, when the Premier suggested a "free vote" not along Party lines. It was an unusual decision, one which hadn't happened since they allowed Catholics a vote. And smart on the Premier.

The result was a 13-13 tie in the Legislature - and Speaker of the House, Kathleen Casey, broke the tie in favour of Sunday shopping (thank God). Shortly before the vote, the Opposition Leader sprained her ankle and a wily cabinet minister suggested it might have been an act of God. We also had a church minister writing to the newspaper editor calling for a protest in front of the legislature. The third reading of the bill stood, which is great news for you folks visiting this winter as you can warm up in our inviting stores – if they decide to open.

The best news is that the bulk of this silliness being debated in our legislature is being missed by the youth of our province. Changes in technology are outpacing old forms of media and our youth are just oblivious to what our politicians are up to.

Only two Liberal MLAs took to social media to ask constituents about Sunday shopping. Backbencher Cynthia Dunsford and Education minister Doug Currie asked via Facebook and Twitter. It appears their "public" findings were overwhelmingly in favour of Sunday shopping, with most of their feedback coming from a younger crowd who engaged in this debate through new media.

Surely these politicians will look back at this debate as a wasted effort of what could have been time used in improving our education and health care system, leaving the business of business to the free enterprise marketplace and the choice of change to others. Our youth are apathetic towards our politicians. If we're going to engage them in debate, it's not going to be about changing store hours as much as it's about changing the world and our way of thinking. There is a youth resurgence in Bob Dylan's tune *The Times They Are A-Changin'*. Maybe it's time for us to follow that tune. | ABM



“If Christ came down off that cross and served it up to her, she'd not take a bite.”