

All-day Sunday shopping may be in the cards in Britain

by [Trevor Grundy](#)

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CANTERBURY, England (RNS) Christian traditionalists may not like it, but all-day Sunday shopping may soon be possible in Britain.

Chancellor George Osborne on Wednesday (July 8) proposed in Parliament that communities be allowed to lift restrictions on supermarkets and department stores to let them trade all day on Sundays starting early next year. Smaller shops would also be permitted to open as long as they like on Sundays as long as local mayors and civil leaders see it as necessary.

The move would bring London into line with Paris and New York, where no restrictions on Sunday shopping exist.

Strict anti-Sunday shopping laws came into being in the 19th century, under Queen Victoria.

In 1986, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher tried to do away with them but she met stiff opposition from traditionalists and Christian churches.

Two decades later a compromise was reached, and most shops are now allowed to open for six hours on Sunday.

Osborne said that the U.K.'s Conservative-led government was persuaded to liberalize Sunday shopping laws to boost the economy. In London alone, Sunday business would create 3,000 more jobs and generate extra income for central businesses by 200 million pounds a year, say economists.

Just before this year's general election in May, the Conservatives said they had "no current plans to relax Sunday trading laws."

At that time the Church of England issued a statement saying, "We believe that for family stability and community life, as many people as possible should have the possibility of a common day off every week."

Under current laws, Christians who object to working on Sundays cannot be fired by their firms. Trade unions are expected to seek assurances that those rights are not eroded under planned legislation that would accompany the change.