

November 30, 1992

Frustration - Flea market flourishes as other merchants fume

Montreal Gazette

There was Sunday shopping on the South Shore yesterday.

While Jacques Parizeau and his cohorts in the Parti Quebecois congratulated themselves for doing their bit to prolong the recession by delaying the Sunday shopping legislation, the brand- new Super Mercado flea market off Taschereau Blvd. could not have been busier if it had been giving away money.

Traffic was backed up for at least a couple of clicks in the left- hand-turn lane off Taschereau. There was at least one accident serious enough to bring out an ambulance, and the private security guards hired to direct traffic in the massive parking lot had their hands full. There was not a square foot of extra parking space in sight.

The Super Mercado, a flea market with a Latin-American twist ("mercado" means "market" in Spanish) has been open only a month. Obviously, it was the right idea at the right time. The Super Mercado is open Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday - but even on a Thursday morning the rent-a-cops are on duty to keep traffic flowing through the parking lot.

It's hard to believe that earlier this fall the site featured nothing but an **abandoned Bonimart store** and a gone-out-of-business automobile dealership, both among the more visible victims of the never-ending recession.

Even on the days when other stores are allowed to stay open, you have to stand in line to get into the Super Mercado.

Yesterday, with other merchants forced to keep their doors shut by the loopy obstructionists of the PQ, the Super Mercado was pandemonium central.

No play-by-play on this action

Much as I would like to bring you a combat-zone report from inside the flea market, you have to understand. My idea of hell is the Fairview Mall on a Saturday afternoon before Christmas. If the parking lot is any indication, the Super Mercado makes Fairview look like a ghost town. For me to have waded through that mob they would have had to have been giving away money.

What they were doing was taking money, not giving it away. And taking it in bundles, if the volume of traffic through the parking lot is any indication.

Much as you have to cheer for anyone doing that well in this economy, you also have to sympathize with older, established merchants who have been fighting for their lives through three years of recession.

Yesterday, they could only gnaw their knuckles in frustration and think of what might have been - if only Jacques Parizeau and his gang of stiff-necked, unbending, narrow-minded ideologues hadn't decided that a procedural point took precedence over the welfare of the people of Quebec.

All right, so Industry Minister Gerald Tremblay should not have announced Sunday shopping before the legislation had been tabled in the National Assembly.

But with an estimated 8,816 jobs, \$200 million in wages and \$43.2 million in increased tax revenues (to lower the deficit, M. Parizeau) on the line, the PQ could have put jobs before public posturing just this once.

They didn't - and I fervently hope that their thick-headed rigidity comes back to haunt them in the next election.

A lot of advertising got cancelled

Because this one hurt - we may never know how much. Because stores were supposed to be open yesterday, advertisers had been buying bundles of space in yesterday's Gazette.

All day Thursday, sales reps in the advertising department were kept busy taking cancellation after cancellation - along with some angry outbursts aimed at the PQ from francophone and anglophone merchants alike.

If Jacques Parizeau were a little less plump, I'm sure he would turn a few cartwheels at the news that his action cost The Gazette a bundle of advertising revenue - but the same thing was certainly happening at La Presse and Le Journal.

If the Liberals of Premier Bourassa had their way, stores from the Fairview Mall to St. Bruno would have been open

yesterday.

The struggling department stores would at least have had a chance to compete with the Super Mercado and the stores in New York and Vermont, New Brunswick and Ontario which were allowed to remain open yesterday.

Instead they can only dream of the hundreds of thousands of Christmas shopping dollars which have already flowed elsewhere - thanks to Smilin' Jacques and his Parti Quibblicois.

There's one consolation. Smilin' Jacques is going to have to explain this one on the campaign trail next time out. I can hear him now:

"Vote for us! We kept jobs out of Quebec! We forced more businesses into bankruptcy! Imagine how bad things will be with us running the store!"

And I wonder: D'you suppose the PQ will allow candidates to campaign on Sundays?

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