

## **PE1780/E**

Scottish Trades Union Congress submission of 27 November 2020

The STUC fully supports Usdaw's petition calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to launch a consultation on implementing legislation already in place to ban large shops from opening on New Year's Day.

The festive period provides an opportunity for people to have a rest and enjoy the company of friends, family and loved ones. As noted by the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon on 8 January 2020

"Shopworkers deserve a festive break such as the rest of us get the benefit of."

Unfortunately, for retail workers who have to work especially hard in the busy run up to Christmas and New Year, it can prove very difficult to find time away from work. As noted by Usdaw's 2019, survey, 74% of retail workers reported that they spend too little time with loved ones over New Year.

The STUC is aware that some employers have already agreed to close all stores on Boxing Day and other retail employers have agreed to give additional leave over the festive period. This additional leave is being granted in recognition of the incredible contribution of key workers across the retail sector throughout the Coronavirus pandemic.

At the start of the Coronavirus pandemic, retail workers were finally and quite rightly recognised as key workers. However, the STUC believes that retail workers have been key workers long before the crisis, making an incredible contribution to our economy and society. Retail workers will also continue to be key workers long after the crisis has passed. In addition to recognising these workers as key workers, the STUC believes that it is time to ensure retail workers can have a proper break during the festive period.

The New Year period has a special cultural significance across Scotland. For this reason, the 2007 Christmas and New Year's Day Trading (Scotland) Act clearly made provisions for consultation on banning large retail premises from opening across Scotland on New Year's Day. Thirteen years after the Act came into force, it is now time to consult on the New Year's Day provisions contained in the Act.

The STUC is aware that members, from all affiliated unions who organise in retail, have to work especially hard in the busy run up to Christmas and New Year. Throughout all this hard work, retail workers are currently only guaranteed one day off, on Christmas Day. All too often, this day can be spent catching up on sleep and attempting to recover from working excessive hours rather than enjoy time with friends and loved ones.

Furthermore, the STUC believes that banning large shops from opening on New Year's Day will reduce the need for workers in other industries, such as public transport, emergency services and hospitality to attend work on this date. As such, it is likely that the benefits of New Year's Day closures in retail will spread to other sectors of the economy.

It is clear that retail workers who do so much to ensure the rest of society can enjoy the festivities, should be provided with an opportunity to enjoy the festive period themselves.

There are a number of long-established organisational benefits of annual leave. Ensuring that employees can maintain a good work-life balance helps to avoid employee stress and burnout. Furthermore, spending time away from work with the people we love is very important for good mental health.

Unfortunately, under the current system, retail workers find it incredibly difficult to spend time away from work with loved ones. While Christmas shutdowns are still common across large areas of manufacturing, education and office based industries, workers across the retail sector find it impossible book any quality time away from work in the build-up to the festive period. In fact, retailers frequently enforce a holiday ban through the whole of December and sometimes parts of November.

On one of the last days before the rest of the nation returns to work, and a day where according to Usdaw's figures, 72% of retail workers report that their shops are either fairly or very quiet, retail workers truly deserve an opportunity to spend time relaxing with family and friends. As such, we support the call to launch a consultation on implementing legislation already in place to ban large shops from opening on New Year's Day.