

No compromise on federalism

Lydia Pawlenko

Quebec should not be given special status by the federal government, according to Peter Meekison, Alberta's Deputy Minister of Federal and Interprovincial Affairs.

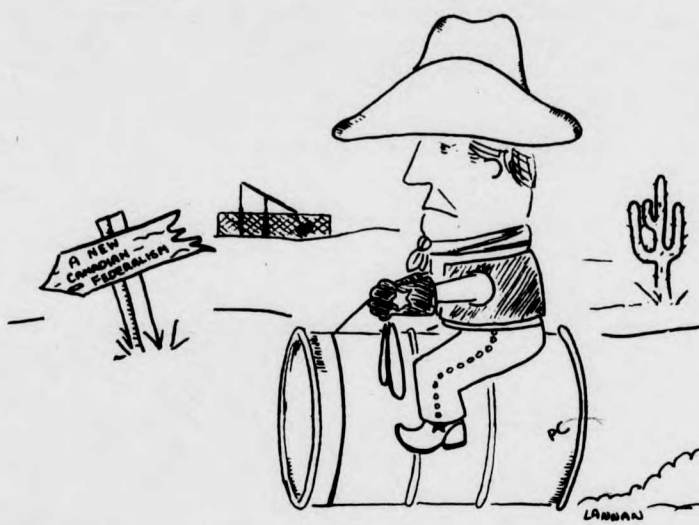
Speaking out against Sovereignty Association at a graduate political science colloquium at Vanier College last Monday, Meekison told the Canada-Quebec Study Group that from a western perspective, "the constitution should allow that all provinces have special status." He stressed Alberta's strong position of favoring the restructuring of power towards all provinces, not only Quebec.

While the government of Alberta is not sympathetic to the idea of Quebec separating, Meekison, in a clear-cut manner, commented, "The system that we have requires changes. But if you want out you want all the way out." He criticized what he sees as vagueness surrounding the terms of the referendum question.

Alberta endorses the attainment of greater provincial power and does give partial approval of Claude Ryan's proposal for a new Canada of 11 sovereign governments, which would enable the province to opt out of certain federal programs but get their share of funds. Meekison pointed out, however, the West's resentment towards disproportionate power that Quebec would hold in a "federal council"

whose members would be delegated by the provinces. Under the Quebec Liberal's comprehensive proposal for "A New Canadian Federalism," Quebec would be guaranteed a minimum of 25 per cent of the seats in the non-elected Council, even though its share of Canada's total population falls below one-quarter. Meekison expressed concern over whether the power of provincial legislatures would actually be enhanced.

When asked about the current state of the federal system, Meekison responded positively. "I happen to think it's good," he said. "The governments are discussing a wide range of issues."



I think the two economic conferences were extremely important."

The Minister does not see any signs of revolt against Quebec in Western Canada. "In the election, I didn't get any feel of backlash against French Canada," he explained. "It wasn't an issue. It wasn't a crucial variable."

In terms of feeling, Meekison thinks there is "a genuine affection between the people of Quebec and Alberta." Quebec has decided to open an office in Edmonton which will promote trade and tourism, and also "keep an eye on energy projects."

Plight of Ethiopian Jews

Abbe Edelson

"My people are suffering, starving. Some youngsters like you have been sold into slavery," said Rachamim Alazar, a spokesman for the Black Jews in Ethiopia. "Because of the civil war in Ethiopia, people are suffering from disease."

Alazar spoke at York on Wednesday, February 27 to help raise public awareness about the plight of the Ethiopian Jews—the Falashas. Falasha means "stranger" or "exile" in Ethiopian. However, they prefer to be known as "Beta Israel" meaning "House of Israel."

Also included in the program was a slide presentation of the Falasha villages in Ethiopia given by Bertha Lightstone from the Falasha Task Force of NETWORK (a North American Jewish Student umbrella organization).

The population of Ethiopian Jews was approximately 500,000 three centuries ago, but in 1980 only 28,000 survive. The Falashas are Zionists with a strong connection to Israel. Due to the desperate conditions in Ethiopia, their connection with Israel is even stronger, as they want to emigrate there.

The origin of the Falashas is

unknown. Some people believe they were one of the original tribes of Israel, but have been in Ethiopia since King Solomon's times. Although they have lived in isolation from other Jewish communities, they adhere strongly to the traditions of Judaism, as they were 2,000 years ago. After centuries of isolation, they were visited in 1867 by a French Jewish scholar, Joseph Halevy, after reports reached Europe from Christian missionaries in Ethiopia. During the 1920's, Jacques Faitlovitch organized committees in Palestine, Europe and the United States, to help the Falashas.

In recent years, support for the Falashas has increased internationally, as people have become more aware of the desperate conditions which exist in Ethiopia.

Rachamim Alazar has been living in Israel since 1972 and presently is studying at the University of Tel Aviv. As a spokesman for Ethiopian Jewry, he has been active in pressing its case with Prime Minister Begin, and opposition leader Shimon Peres. His recent visit to York is part of a tour organized by NETWORK, to gain active support for the Falashas.

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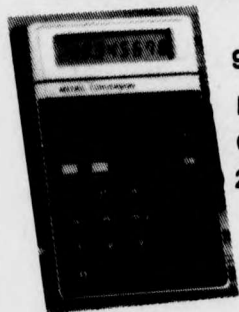
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