

# EDITORIAL

by Allan Carter

The debate on the Canadian constitution has unfortunately been a long one and, for many Canadians, terribly boring. Given the numerous issues which the media have been reporting on and analyzing for the past few months, the Canadian constitutional crisis has not been a high priority for many people.

That, however, is quickly changing now that the premiers have finally drafted an agreement which they all publicly support. Now the debate has drifted out from behind the closed political doors and Canadians have to decide whether they are going to vote yes or no in a national referendum. The question for that referendum will apparently be: "Do you agree that the constitution of Canada should be renewed on the basis of the agreement reached on August 28, 1992?"

As an article in the *Globe and Mail* stated last Saturday, Canadians will be flooded with information about the agreement reached by the premiers in August. Some of this information will be positive, in an attempt to try to entice Canadians to vote yes. On the other hand, there will be various groups who will produce information which will poke holes in a proposed agreement which the premiers themselves claim is not perfect. Of course, these groups want Canadians to vote no. Included in these groups is the National Action Committee on the Status of Women and, in recent developments, some members of the Quebec liberal party, particularly the youth wing, are campaigning for Canadians to say no on October 26.

It is anybody's guess what will happen in the next several weeks before October 26. And it is also difficult to determine, at this point, which side will win. But until then, various politicians, lobbying groups, and other interested organizations will be frantically campaigning for either side.

Premier Frank McKenna has his own strategy. He is attempting to convince the powerful business communities across Canada to appeal to Canadians to vote yes so that the government can then focus more

attention on economic concerns. McKenna goes even as far as to claim that "voting no will plunge us into an economic and constitutional quicksand and a constitutional black hole." The premier's strategy is very clever and it will probably work because most people agree that the economy needs to be dealt with - and quickly. It is, however, difficult to draw a line between constitutional issues and economic ones, although the federal government and some of the provincial governments have done so. Certainly, many Canadians would be more inclined to see their country as a whole if the economic climate was a bit more pleasant than it presently is.

Other strategies include reminding Canadians of how peaceful and civilized Canada is. In fact, Canadians should count their blessings, according to many politicians in the House of Commons, because while other countries deal with separation with guns and bullets, Canadians use paper and words. Indeed, Canada is a wonderful country to live in, but with regard to the constitution we should not lose our perspective.

While Canada is a country that has much to be proud about, it is also a country where systems are far from perfect. Many politicians keep making reference to how civilized Canadians are and, for the most part, our governmental procedures appear very civilized on paper, but just how civilized are they when they are finally put into real practice? Take for instance our immigration methods and consider the situation which Sister Anne Schenck witnessed in Toronto when Letteyesus Girmai, and her three children, Yodita, aged 9, Solomon, age 6, and Baby Mussie (who was born in Canada) were told that "an exclusion order was made against" them and they had to be removed from Canada immediately. Several letters were sent to the Minister of Immigration, Mr. Bernard Valcourt, asking the government to reconsider the case. Girmai's husband was lost in Kuwait during the Gulf war and she would probably not be accepted back into Ethiopia since they refuse to admit returning

refugees. Sister Schenck had to inform her that the pleas to reconsider the case were unsuccessful:

With heavy heart I arrived at the apartment where Letteyesus was sobbing convulsively. "I must be the bad one," she had said. "If I die, they may let the children stay in Canada." Fearing that she might attempt suicide, I phoned Canada Immigration to pose this possibility.

"What would happen to the children if Letteyesus carried out her threat?" The answer: they would be handed over to the Children's Aid Society and summarily deported.

Is this the response of a country noted for its compassion and humanitarian response to those in greatest need? I could not believe that Canada had become so hardened"

- Catholic New Times

Many would argue that immigration laws have little to do with the current constitutional crisis. Nevertheless, at one time these policies were just part of a proposal and they were debated about until they finally became law and a standard system was implemented. Obviously, many officials must have believed that these policies were fairly humane, yet many Canadians would strongly disagree. Right now, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women believe that social programs and gender equality would suffer under the proposed constitutional agreement. They, like many who are critical about the immigration policies, appear to be questioning some of the factors within the constitutional deal.

In the House of Commons, arguing over issues may be done in a fairly civilized manner. However, smiling faces, praises about how great Canada is, and humorous jokes do not guarantee that the policies and systems implemented are as humane as Canadians are led to believe. Perhaps that is why it is just as important to listen to what the no side is saying about the constitution during the next several weeks as it is the yes side.



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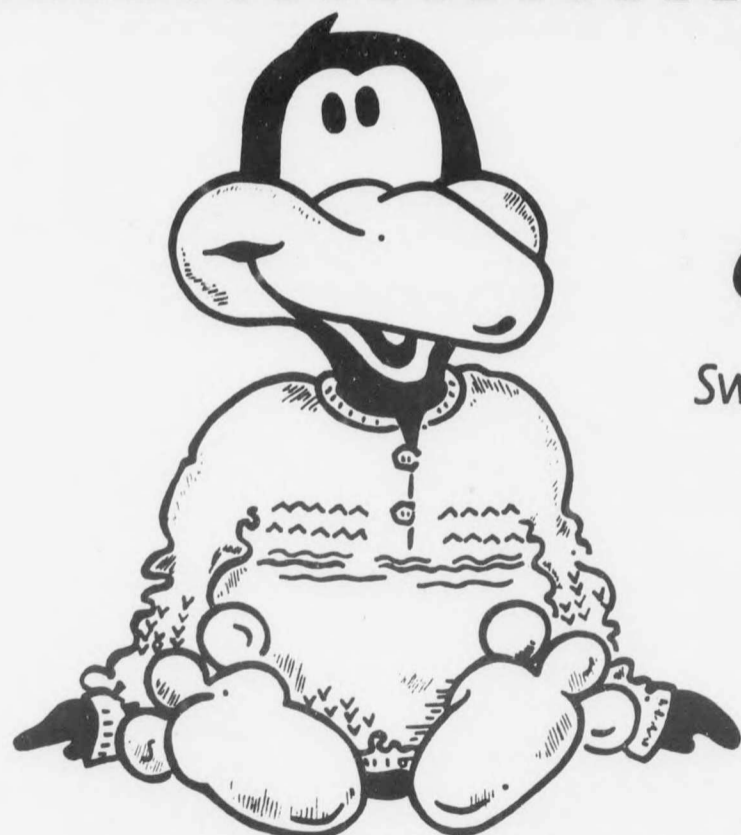
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