

Interview:

Phil Givens, former Mayor and federal MP, recounts the harsh legacy of twentieth century Tory-Orange Toronto



During Givens' many years in politics, he met with leaders of many religious and political backgrounds.

Q. How did you get started in your political career?

A. I graduated from Harbord, went to U of T and started out in Arts, but didn't like it.

My grades were good enough to get into Political Science and Economics, so I graduated from there in '45.

I went to Law School, was called to the bar in '49, and immediately got into the political scene. I was elected Alderman, became a Controller, then Mayor.

Then I got mixed up in the Moore sculpture in front of City Hall, which I'm not going to talk about because I don't want to start crying.

After the defeat in the winter of '66, I ran federally with Trudeau in '68. He and I quarrelled over the federal role in urban affairs. So I left Trudeau in the fall of '71, ran provincially, got elected in the riding of York-Forest Hill, which was subsequently gerimandered out of existence.

So, I ran in the riding of Armourdale and I beat Mel Lastman. It was the only time Mel Lastman ever got beaten. And subsequently, in '77, I was appointed a member of the Police Commission, and then a judge, and became Chairman of the Police Commission, which brings us up to date.

So, I've had a series of short term careers, all of which I considered sort of periodic post-graduate courses. I think I would qualify as a PhD in each of these careers that I've had. It's been a fascinating life for me.

I think I've got two more (careers) left. One more will be on the bench, and I'd like to be an ambassador to a country, but I don't think that's going to happen. But I think I will be going on the Bench in March.

Q. I recall meeting you once several years ago at the U of T campus. You were saying something about how they used to have racial quotas at university. I was wondering if that had any effect on you? If that type of thinking had any effect on you getting into civic affairs?

A. Ever since the age of eight I was deeply involved in the Jewish community. I had a parallel career in Jewish activities which has made me the president, or the member of an executive, of about every conceivable Jewish organization in town. Just recently, I retired after a 12 year stint as the National President of the Canadian Zionist Federation. So, I got into that long before I was in politics, and I have always felt that my own community from which I stemmed was important, and I never denied, I always felt that I couldn't be a good Canadian without being true to my own community—and I couldn't be a good member of my own community without being a good Canadian. The two were mutually compatible and complimentary.

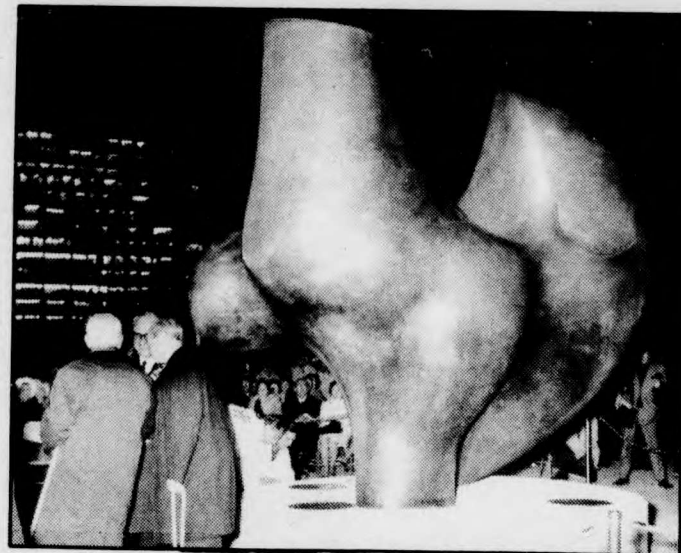
Anyway, let's get to your question in regard to quotas. This city has undergone a complete metamorphosis, a hundred and eighty degree turn, a complete changeover from what it was

when I was born. To put it bluntly, you take the visit of the Pope that took place just a few weeks ago. When I was a boy, a visit of the Pope like that to Toronto would have been totally impossible.

I think when the Pope came down University Avenue there must have been people turning over in their graves in Mount Pleasant cemetery. Because, when I was a boy, this city was Tory Orange Toronto. It was totally WASP, totally Protestant, militantly Orange. The Orange Day Parades in July were the manifestation of the feelings of Toronto. Anybody who was ethnic, or spoke a foreign language, better keep quiet on the streetcars and on the buses. You just kept a very low profile. That's the way it was.



WHO WAS THAT LADY?: During her 1965 visit to Toronto, the Queen Mother met with then-mayor Phil Givens.



PHIL'S FOLLY: Givens at the unveiling of Henry Moore's "Archer"; sculpture was reputed to have cost him election.

Militancy was out. As far as so-called visible minorities, the visibles were invisible, you didn't see them. In the 1920s and '30s, I don't know how many blacks there would have been in Toronto, but very few indeed. Orientals were a handful who huddled around Elizabeth and Queen, and they were all male because they didn't let Oriental women in. The Japanese, forget it. I don't think there were hardly any Japanese.

Q. Was this actually a quota too?

A. Well, I didn't know at the time, but there was a head tax. Orientals couldn't get in and they certainly weren't allowed to bring their women, their wives, or families. That wasn't opened up until much later. Blacks. Blacks didn't come in. Nobody was coming from the Caribbean, and nobody was coming from Africa at the time.

You see, like in the United States, Jewish immigration, Polish, Ukrainian, European immigration came in up until about the '30s. Then when the Depression came, you had the same situation as you had in the States, where steel doors just were rammed shut, and you had no immigration after that.

From the Asian countries there was just a definite discriminatory policy against Asians.

What went on the West I never knew about at the time. They had Chinese and Oriental laborers there, and they stayed there. You didn't get Japanese immigration in Toronto until the Japanese were expelled—that disgusting expulsion that took place from the West during the second world war.

The Japanese were driven out of the west coast and starting coming eastward. And then you had the subsequent Chinese immigration that came in from China and from Hong Kong, and the other Orientals that came from other Asian countries.

So, getting back to the basic question—because you can go off on all kinds of tangents. This city has undergone such a dramatic change, a revolutionary change in color, culture, religion, of such a dramatic nature, that it's difficult to describe.

And when we started out, this narrative of mine, in the '20s, I guess the population of Toronto would have been about six hundred thousand, so now you've got three million people and a great number of who were not living here 60 years ago. I'm 62 now.

When you travel, as I have, of course, I'm sure you have, on the bus, on the subway, it's like being in any international city—whether it's London, or Paris, or Rome. The colors, the visible mosaic or population is incredible.

I've had an education. No millionaire's son could have had a better education. Because my parents were prepared to sacrifice