

# ON DEBARRAS

substantial loss of business in Quebec, and an outcry from politicians and editorialists.

Sun Life has also gone to great lengths to publicize the announcement

of a decision that could have been accomplished by continuing to slip its staff slowly westward.

The company, like so many others following the shift of capital in North America, has been moving its operations and money out of Quebec toward Toronto for more than a decade. Only 20 per cent of the company's operations are still in Quebec, and the actual head office operation

involves only a portion of the 1,800 jobs cited by Sun Life management.

What makes the move even more suspicious, and even less likely to be an "ill-considered mistake", is the fact of who made the decision to announce the proposed move.

Sun Life's board of directors is a classic example of the Canadian "old boy network" that dominates the country's corporate management. It includes the heads of the Bank of Montreal, the Royal Bank of Canada, the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, and the Bank Canadian National. It also includes the heads of major financial

institutions like Royal Trust, Credit Foncier, Canadian Investment Fund and Canadian Pacific Investments. Major resource industries like CIL, Cominco, Consolidated Bathurst, Domtar, Gulf Oil Steel Company of Canada and two others which are more infamous: INCO and Noranda Mines. And names like Ian Sinclair, Alfred Powis, and G. Arnold Hart.

So any decision approved by the Sun Life board affects more than one company. In the words of the Financial Post: "The fact that Sun Life's board is made up of leading members of Canada's financial and business elite also has many people wondering what that portends for further corporate departures from Quebec."

This is probably the most important implication of Sun Life's announcement. Leading financiers and industrialists seem to have agreed on the best way to deal with what they perceive to be the threat of Quebec's independence.

Sun Life's announcement seems to indicate the path at least some large corporations have accepted in their fight against a separate Quebec -- pressure on Quebec voters facing the national referendum.

Two events could have a major effect on the way Quebec people choose to exercise their right to determination for their nation. One would be a federal threat to use the Canadian army to intervene after an independence vote. Trudeau in fact indicated in a New Year interview that he would not hesitate to repeat the tactics of October 1970 and use the armed forces to change people's minds about the wisdom of an independent Quebec.

The other event would be a threat of a mass corporate exodus from the province, and destabilization of the economy, in much the same way as ITT and U.S. copper concerns exercised their power to depose Chilean president Salvatore Allende in 1973.

This sort of threat is not as far-fetched as it might first seem, as evidenced by the corporate attitude that spawned the Brink's escapade in 1970 and so coerced many Quebec voters into electing the

federalist option and Robert Bourassa.

Sun Life, like Royal Trust which engineered the Brinks incident, has for a century milked a comfortable profit out of Quebec. In fact, the records of most English-Canadian and U.S. corporations in Quebec have betrayed a distinctly colonial attitude toward the province and its people.

In Sun Life's case, two of the company's 21 directors are francophones. In a city which is 70 per cent francophone, Sun Life employs 230 French-Canadians out of a total of 2,600 employees. "When you've taken out maintenance staff and the like, they can't even give a fair quota to French-Canadians even in the typing pools," says the province's Finance Minister Jacques Parizeau.

A better indicator of the colonial set-up between Quebec and English business interests is the \$200 million worth of Quebec policy-holders' premiums that the company has re-invested outside the province.

Large Canadian corporations are apprehensive about any political change that might affect their ability to maintain this situation. Despite the Parti Quebecois' pandering to corporations, especially American ones, English-Canadian business interests are united in their opposition to the Quebec independence movement.

Sun Life's early refusal to elaborate on the details of the proposed move, its decision to delay the policy-holders meeting for three months, and its subsequent explanation that the move wouldn't take place for two years seem to indicate that Sun Life isn't any different from other Canadian corporations.

The company, and likely many others, will dangle their decision as threats in the faces of Quebec voters, who worry about the province's future economic stability, until after the referendum on independence. It is the threat to move, rather than any real move, that will have the greatest effect on the spirit of Quebecois.

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