

By Larry Black  
of Canadian University Press

Two weeks before the crucial 1970 Quebec election, a spectacular caravan of heavily-armed Brink's trucks, laden with bonds and securities "sneaked" across the Ontario-Quebec border under the watchful eye of most of Montreal's mass media.

Now, eight years later, the Sun Life Assurance Company of Canada, the country's largest insurer and seventh largest financial institution, has announced that it too intends to sneak across the Ontario border with its stocks, bonds, and head offices.

The stated reason for the move, which won't

take place for two years (until after the national referendum on Quebec's independence) is Quebec's language law, Bill 101, which the company says affects its ability to operate its multinational head office.

The threat to move out of Quebec at this time has caused a stir in Canada, particularly among those interested in the outcome of that referendum.

The Quebec government has exposed the corporation as a "poor corporate citizen" and threatened to repatriate the \$200 million the company has extracted from the province. Federalist

politicians, from the Toronto Liberal MP's

caucus to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and Finance Minister Jean Chretien, have been wailing about the company's responsibility to help preserve the Canadian confederation. And the Financial Post has run front page banner headlines asking "Did the company really have to say it now?"

It's an interesting question The Post itself finds the company's "decision to cite Bill 101 as the reason for its proposed departure a little premature, to say the least."

The company has stuck to this claim -- "that language is the real reason" -- and has delayed a policy-holders meeting on the move for three months. Company president Thomas Galt insists that the lack of rights to English education for the children of staff coming to Quebec was a major element in the company's decision: "The language of education is of vital importance in the acceptability of Montreal as a place to live."

And James Sinclair, Trudeau's father-in-law and a member of Sun Life's board of directors has said: "All he (Quebec premier Rene Levesque) has to do to stop this hemorrhage is to announce that head offices of multinational companies can operate in English and that head office families can send their children to English or French schools."

This excuse, (besides showing an unusual concern on the part of a company like Sun Life for its employees), raises a lot of questions about the company's real motives.

The most obvious is that Bill 101, as it stands, does not interfere with the language rights of head office staffs of multinationals. During the hearings on the bill, the government backed down on this point, and has yet to draft the regulations for head offices.

But there is little doubt the government will accept the recommendation of its language office, which suggests that

language cannot be legislated for multinational headquarters. French should instead be encouraged through an "effective school system so that companies can hire local people without sacrificing quality," the language commissioners say.

Provisions have already been made for the children of multinational executives who are transferred into the province for three-year, renewable periods.

Not a government "hard-line", and not one that would justify a \$10 million move -- a move which would invariably be accompanied by a

## CIA VS vs PQ

There is an interesting post-script to the Sun Life threat.

One year ago, on Jan. 4, 1977, two agents of the Central Intelligence Agency attended a meeting at a Toronto hotel, organized by an employee of a major multinational operating in Canada. The meeting of representatives of multinationals was set up to study ways of disparaging the newly-elected Parti Quebecois government.

According to reports in both Le Devoir of Montreal and Le Soleil of Quebec City, those attending discussed ways of "destabilizing the economy of the province, possible methods of halting the referendum, and the possibility of eliminating Premier Rene Levesque and other members of the cabinet."

Lavon Strong, public relations spokesperson for the CIA denied any knowledge of the meeting: "We did not participate in the meeting and know nothing about it. The rumours are without foundation."

But the Quebec ministry of justice thought rumours of a planned economic destabilization were serious enough to call an investigation. The minister, Marc-Andre Bedard, reported that the investigation ended March 23 and found the meeting never occurred and the affair was "without serious foundation."

But Le Soleil says the investigation was called

in mid-December after an earlier meeting of the multinationals in Ottawa. Two officers of the Quebec Provincial Police, Claude Menard and Maurice Dalpe, went to the Toronto meeting, the Quebec newspaper said. Its sources were highly-placed officials in "the government, the police, and elsewhere."

The suspicions about the meeting seem confirmed by the statements of Parti Quebecois ministers. Levesque is quoted as saying "certain people could be interested in an economic destabilization operation," but he would not say if the CIA would be involved.

Claude Charron said such an affair would "only be the tip of an iceberg. There are many people who are ready by any means, including illegal and criminal acts, to overthrow the government."

Jean-Pierre Charbonneau, another pequisite deputy, said that many of his colleagues "are aware of the possibility of violent acts to destabilize the regime."

And Bedard himself hinted there was more to the case than he was telling.

But the story ended there. Four days after the story broke, Le Soleil was closed by labour conflict, and Le Devoir did not follow the issue.

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