

## “To the Ends of the Earth”: Mennonites in Central and South America

Starting in the 1920s thousands of Mennonites left Canada and settled in Mexico, Paraguay, Belize, Bolivia as well as Brazil and Uruguay. What prompted them to leave the security and comfort of Canada for what was at that time considered to be dangerous, backward societies?

There are at least three answers to that question:

1. the Canadian government rescinded, reneged on original promises of educational freedom.
2. the leaders , particularly of the Sommerfelder groups, were resistant to the integration into larger society.
3. that is was God’s will and the move was a faithful Christian response to the circumstances.

### Education Crisis

#### 1. Education in Canada

- a. “Privilegium” had given them full educational rights ‘without any kind of molestation or restriction”
- b. Most teachers were self-taught men.

#### 2. Curriculum

- a. Focus on reading, writing, arithmetic and religion
- b. Fibler (lower) Testamenler (middle) Bibler ( upper)
- c. Much emphasis placed on memorization - ten commandments, hymns etc
- d. Writing and penmanship

#### 3. Crisis

- a. Making of British Citizens
  - i. Not sensitive to multiculturalism



*Die Febel*



- ii. Fighting with French, immigrants, for identify
- iii. Solution, make them all British.

4. **1890** All schooling must be in English
- a. No compulsory attendance so government schools sat empty as German schools full!
  - b. Would no longer give \$ to church run schools (anti-Catholic policy)



5. **1907**
- a. Required to fly Union Jack, hang picture of King, sing "God Save the King"
  - b. Implied connection to militarism - removal of exemption?
  - c. Some returned to private schools

6. **1916 Manitoba School Attendance Act**
- a. Conducted in English, built English schools, attendance compulsory, British curriculum
  - b. Parents were fined (\$15/month) for each school aged child not in school

7. **Opposition**

- a. required non-Mennonite teachers, as there were not enough Mennonite teachers who knew English
- b. "Unnecessary" subjects - like British history, poetry, literature, and geography.
- c. German language was almost inseparable from their faith
- d. Noncompliance resulted in fines of \$1000, prosecution and jail



8. **Loss of Confidence**

- a. Letter of promise from government in 1873 was considered irrelevant
- b. Seen as an act of betrayal
- c. began looking for new homes