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Only Christians need apply to party

By ROB KELLY

The requirement for membership in a newly emerging federal political party which hopes to field a candidate in Halton-Peel during the next election is first and foremost shared religious conviction, not shared political conviction.

Because whatever one's beliefs concerning the party's positions are, the passport to participation in the Christian Heritage Party of Canada is Christianity. Jews, Moslems, Hindus or Zen Buddhists need not apply.

The party maintains some separation between church and state, in that it will not allow clergy members to run for parliament, said Jeff Streutker, a member who is working on launching the Halton-Peel wing. But, he added, "we believe church and state cannot be fully separated."

"The idea behind every political party is moral standards," Mr. Streutker said. The Progressive Conservatives, Liberals and New Democratic Party "have nothing really basic to base standards on."

A brochure distributed by the party calls for "preservation of biblically-based civil law."

Mr. Streutker characterized the party's politics as "generally slightly to the right." He added that "many of the people that formed our party were PC's" who have become disenchanted with Prime Minister Brian Mulroney. They were, he said, "very disappointed with his performance."

In particular, the disappointment with the government stems from the current abortion and capital punishment situations, Mr. Streutker said. The party supports re-introduction of capital punishment and is opposed to abortion.

Formed in 1986, the Christian Heritage Party has grown from 1,000 members a year ago to "almost 10,000 now. We are hoping for 50 riding associations to field candidates in the next election."

The party will sanction any riding association with 100 members. Mr. Streutker had scheduled a founding meeting in Georgetown for Tuesday night.

In adhering to tenets of the bible

the party will not gauge performance by poll popularity, he said. "It's a party that does not really like to base policy on what the public currently thinks about things. The big three parties look at polls."

Present popular thinking, Mr. Streutker said, supports a "do anything you think is right, in your eyes" code of conduct. "We do not believe people can fulfill their lives in that manner. We are concerned about the overall movement of society. Our laws are based on Christian principles. We would like to see a movement back toward those types of things."

The membership drive brochure supports a vigorous military presence, and continued participation in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the North American Air Defence Command (NORAD).

State-sponsored or subsidized programs, such as welfare, should "promote patriotism and social responsibility matched with compassion for the truly disadvantaged," the brochure states.

Mr. Streutker said the party will accept members of any Christian religion or those stating that they support Christian principles.

Such a stance does not mean intolerance of other religions, he stressed. "We would never say that. We fully endorse pluralism. We affirm the right to religion as stated in the Charter of Rights."

"It is legal to do it this way," he continued. "It's a safeguard to keep our principles sincere and followed closely."

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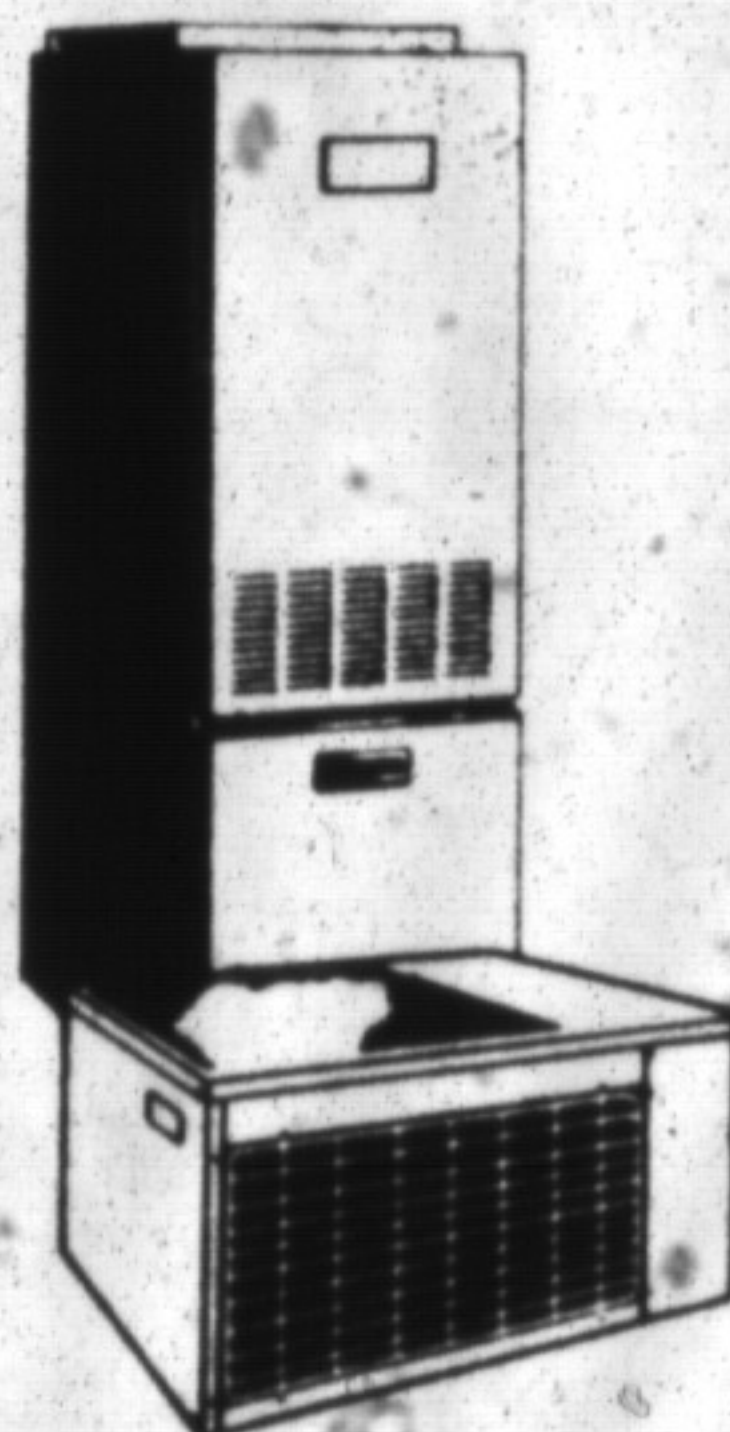
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