

18TH ANNUAL PREMIERS CONFERENCE

Statement of the Prime Minister of Quebec,
Mr. René Lévesque,
Concerning Reciprocal Agreements in Education

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Reciprocity and Education

The language problem was part of the set of thorny questions which the government of the Parti Québécois inherited when it came to power last November. Actually, this was one of the hottest issues of the last election campaign - and all the parties then agreed on the need to review from beginning to end the clauses of Bill 22 concerning the language of instruction.

Moreover, it was the second time that this question of language became a major electoral stake and contributed finally to the defeat of the government in power. In 1970, in effect, the Bertrand government was repudiated largely because of Bill 63 which it had passed to guarantee freedom of choice as to the language of instruction. Then, in 1976, it was that of Mr. Bourassa which was attacked from all sides for having failed at the job by wanting to settle this question with aptitude tests.

As soon as we came to power, we therefore had to get down to work immediately in order to try to settle this problem before the beginning of the new school year. We entrusted this mandate to a Minister of State, Dr. Camille Laurin, who did not have a department to occupy him and was able to devote most of his time to this matter. After having constituted several work groups and held broad-based consultations, Dr. Laurin proposed a White Paper to the government which, after discussion, was published last March. This White Paper was followed by Draft Bill No 1, bearing the title "The French Language Charter of Quebec", which was immediately sent to a parliamentary committee responsible for hearing the interested individuals and groups. This committee sat for five consecutive weeks in order to hear a representative sampling of the 260 briefs received. Then the government altered its draft bill and presented an amended version in the form of Draft Bill No 101. The debate on second reading of this new draft bill lasted 2 weeks and two more weeks have elapsed while a committee is examining the different articles and bringing still further changes to it.

The problem to which Draft Bill 101 would like to bring a solution is one of the most fundamental to Quebec society. In two words, it could be thus resumed. According to recent demographic trends, the size of the French-speaking collectivity in Canada is rapidly decreasing. Even in Quebec, there is great danger that the proportion of Francophones decrease appreciably, specially in the Montreal region. This evolution can be

accounted for mainly by two factors: a reduction in the birth rate of Francophones (which historically was far ahead of that of Anglophones) and the assimilation into the Anglophone community of the vast majority of immigrants coming to Quebec. So much so that, in recent years, the majority of students attending our English Catholic schools did not have English as their mother language.

Moreover, one should not forget a brutally evident phenomenon. The Francophones of Quebec and those of Canada together make up a group of about 6 million people. Surrounding us in Canada and the United States there live and constantly develop an immense mass of 240 million English-speaking people. In North America, for every Francophone there are 40 Anglophones!

This in itself - in a world where cultures penetrate each other and where distances no longer exist, this 1 to 40 ratio - should urge even the most indifferent to perceive our situation and also to understand our reactions, our attitudes and our aspirations.

This very real danger of a collective decline also has an obvious historical background which is that of a minority people and one rather dispossessed. This is how we evoked this background in the program which led us to power. "In a normal country, business uses the language of the majority and the immigrants integrate naturally into the majority language group which holds most of the key positions". (This is what happens very naturally everywhere in Canada where the majority is English-speaking). "Quebec, quite to the contrary, resembles a colonized country: the Francophones with equal education have terribly more than their share of low income jobs; the Anglophones have an inversely proportional share of key positions and on bill-boards, newspapers, radio and television display an exorbitant presence which favours the anglicization of Quebecers; immigrants integrate themselves into the English school system in a proportion of 90%. If this evolution continues and at the same pace, the Francophones risk becoming a minority in Montreal within a generation".

Except for people who can resign themselves to extinction, such a situation naturally demands to be rectified. And Quebecers of all origins are just about unanimous on this point. It is necessary, on the one hand, to give a more important place to French in all spheres of our social life and particularly in the economic sector - and, on the other, one must restrict access to English schools so that it ceases to be an instrument of assimilation.

I would like to say a word about the philosophy which inspired us as to the language of instruction. We adopted the principle common to a large majority of countries to the effect, generally speaking, that public instruction is given in the language of the majority and that instruction in the language of the minority, which is an exception, is reserved to the members of this minority. Therefore, there can be no question in such a context of freedom of choice between two equally accessible systems. French school is compulsory for all except the members of the English community for whom, as a minority, the right to instruction (in their own language) is recognized.

And I would like to point out here, very frankly, that it is an easy virtue to proclaim elsewhere this principle of equal accessibility (moreover, often enough, it is not applied in practice) while for the Francophone cultural community of Quebec, where the application has traditionally been total, the same principle could eventually risk becoming suicidal.

So, a basic decision was made; that an immigrant coming to Quebec finds himself exactly in the same legal position as the French-speaking Quebecer: both must send their children to French schools.

Once this principle had been defined, it was necessary to determine how one would identify the persons for whom we recognize the right to English schooling. We have chosen to be rather generous in this respect for the persons who are already in Quebec and rather strict towards those who will come to establish themselves in Quebec in the future. It seemed to us, in effect, that it was necessary to give maximum respect to the vested rights of those who had taken advantage of the previous system or who had the right to expect to continue to do so while imposing new regulations upon those who, with full knowledge of the facts, would come to establish themselves in the future.

And so it is that all Anglophones who are presently in Quebec (an Anglophone is defined as a person who studied at the elementary level in English) may, from generation to generation, send their children to an English school. It will be thus also for all those who are presently in the English system as well as for their younger brothers and sisters, in order to protect the integrity of families.

Furthermore, to facilitate the mobility of workers and executives, we have promised access to English schools for all those who will come to Quebec on a temporary basis.

With this arrangement, the Anglophones who come to establish themselves in Quebec are considered in the same way as other new arrivals: normally, they should send their children to French schools unless their stay be of a temporary nature.

We have been told, however, that this could create the impression of a sort of wall between Quebec and the rest of Canada - while quite to the contrary, no matter what the political evolution may be, we want to maintain the best possible links between us. Furthermore, Francophone Quebecers who establish themselves in the other provinces normally wish and, it would seem, can increasingly, in certain cases at least, find French schools where they can send their children. This is obviously linked to the fact that, little by little, without anywhere catching up with the eminently privileged position of the English-speaking community of Quebec, the treatment reserved for our minority French-speaking groups has nevertheless improved in recent years, at least in certain provinces, and this should continue.

For this reason, we have accepted the idea of extending access to English schools to the Anglophones of other provinces on a reciprocal basis according to the modalities applicable to the Anglophones of Quebec. I wrote to you along these lines on July 21st last. Since that time several of the Premiers have expressed their desire to discuss this matter during the present Conference, which decision permitted us to add a clause to Draft Bill 101 permitting such agreements of reciprocity. It is a pleasure for me to point out that this amendment received the unanimous support of all parties represented at the National Assembly.

This idea of discussions with other governments concerning measures which could be mutually profitable and writing them into a formal agreement is not exactly unprecedented; each year the Quebec government signs several dozen intergovernmental agreements touching upon many fields of activity. Such is the case with most modern governments.

As to the idea of reciprocity, it has been part of the vocabulary of agreements concluded between governments for a long time now since it was applied to fields as different as the recognition of drivers' licenses, attestations of studies and professional qualifications, the granting of diplomatic privileges and immunity, the transfer of pension funds, taxation, etc. The mobility of individuals has made this co-operation between governments a necessity which everyone recognizes.

The field of education has not escaped this need of governments to consult with each other, to inform each other, to take advantage of the experience of others, to exchange experts and, on occasion, to agree on common policies and programs. In Canada, co-operation between the governments responsible for education was organized and vigorously structured during recent years. The creation, in 1967, of the Canadian Council of Ministers of Education, by virtue of a protocol of agreement accepted by the ten provincial governments, is perhaps the most patent example of a will for collaboration among these governments who, while remaining determined to fully assume their exclusive jurisdiction over education in their own territory, are aware of the need to work together on questions of mutual interest. After 10 years of existence, this Council has, in our opinion, proven itself to be extremely useful despite a certain unweildiness which is really inevitable with such organisms.

Other than this multilateral channel of concertation and co-operation, Quebec and the other provincial governments have given themselves more direct routes for co-operation in matters of education. Thus, in 1969, the Quebec government and the government of Ontario entered into an agreement for co-operation and exchange in educational and cultural matters. Since that time, a permanent committee of top civil servants of the two governments meets twice yearly in order to ensure the application of this agreement. Exchange programs of specialists in the field of education, the exchange of summer jobs for university students, joint projects involving colleges and universities of the two provinces, teacher and teaching material exchanges, scholarships to students of the university level, the organization of many study missions for civil servants of the two provinces, represent but a few illustrations of the many activities which come under the aegis of this agreement for co-operation (see annexed tables).

It was also in 1969 that a similar agreement was signed between Quebec and New Brunswick. Although the volume of activities has not reached the proportions of the Ontario-Quebec exchanges, the agreement has permitted the Departments of Education of the two provinces to collaborate rather closely on a goodly number of subjects. Furthermore, Quebec has taken measures so that a certain number of French-speaking students from New Brunswick have easier access to Quebec universities in those disciplines where French instruction is not given in New Brunswick. Specialized Quebec institutions have also welcomed children who required a service which could not be found in New Brunswick, at the request of that province for such services. This type of co-operation between immediate neighbours should of course be encouraged (see annexed tables).

Finally, interprovincial co-operation in education has given rise, in recent years, to a large number of projects involving Quebec and other provincial governments. Although there are no formal co-operation agreements with provinces other than Ontario and New Brunswick, Quebec has answered a large number of requests coming from the different departments, agencies, institutions and persons involved in education in the other provinces. For example, for a period of three years, Quebec detached a top Quebec civil servant to the Department of Education of Manitoba to act as a co-ordinator for setting up teaching services in French in that province. Moreover, there is every reason to believe that Quebec-Manitoba co-operation will continue for many years since, barely a few months ago, the Premier of that province, Mr. Schreyer, and the Quebec Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Mr. Morin, issued a joint communiqué in which they announced the intention to pursue co-operation programs in the field of education and French culture (exchanges of education staff, of teaching material and teacher training, etc.).

I believe that these few examples are quite sufficient to show that the governments responsible for education in Canada, while assuming their full constitution jurisdiction in this field, have up to date been quite open to bilateral agreements and mutual assistance. For this reason, the Quebec government suggests to the governments of the other provinces who wish, as we do, for a broader accessibility to instruction in the language of the minority, to join with us in conceiving reciprocity agreements to this effect.

We are not unaware that, for certain provinces, this could be difficult to contemplate, for the time being at least, because they still do not have sufficient French instruction services to give full import to such agreements. For others, for whom the setting up of generalized instruction services in French is already an accepted and widely implemented objective, this is more immediately conceivable. Because we are aware of the special position of each province, Quebec is not proposing an unrealistic arrangement which would be unacceptable. Quite to the contrary, what we wish to achieve through our suggestion is that, together, with the means available and at the pace that we ourselves shall set, we agree on a few principles inspired by generosity and also by simple fairness. As to the modalities, we are thinking of agreements which could be different from one province to the other, and which would provide for reasonable delays in their application. Moreover, Quebec would be prepared to co-operate in implementing these agreements by means of an exchange of professors and teaching material. We are therefore confident that if the

will exists among ourselves to conclude such agreements, it should be possible to do so in a relatively short time. In so doing, we could resolve one of the most thorny problems in our reciprocal relations.