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Standing Committee on Official Languages

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To The Standing Committee on Official Languages

There has been a great deal of discussion about how Bill C-13 will strengthen French in Quebec, and how it might impact the Anglophone minority. However people seemed to be missing a key point. **The passing of this bill might well be the start of the disintegration of Canada as a country.** I often spend several months in the winter in the US and I have watched as seemingly innocuous pieces of legislation are gradually tearing the country apart and its future is by no means certain. The passage of this bill would take a giant step in that direction.

I have been following the legal arguments on what Bill C-13 will mean to the Anglophone community of which you have heard a lot of but I have lived in Quebec since 1968 and have direct personal experiences which will demonstrate how language laws have harmed Anglophones and they are about to get worse with this bill if the Quebec Charter of rights is adopted as part of the legislation.

These restricted rights will hurt Francophones even more than anglophones in the future.

I am a lawyer who worked for almost 25 years in the Department of Justice in various Legal Services researching and approving as well as negotiating Specific and Comprehensive land claims all over the country including 10 years taking the Nunavut Claim to the eastern Arctic to the Agreement in Principle stage and was managing part of the process through many of those years. This is just to say I know about rights I have been watching from a distance the discussions around Bill C-13

I moved to the Chelsea Quebec in 1968, the year I started law school. After that I decided I should try to learn French even though it was the only subject I ever failed in school. I joined the Justice department in 1973 and for 10 years I took every opportunity to take French classes. During that time I experienced the practical application of every theory of language teaching that the government was experimenting with.

During 1995 I was on full time language training, a requirement for the management position I was in. At the time I remember regularly reading Maclean's Magazine and the French equivalent L'Actualite which were national magazines most widely read by Canadians. I thought at the time this is not going to end well because it was clear the parties were not actually listening to each other and that is a sure sign any solution was not likely to be successful. The very close result of the Quebec referendum should have been a huge wake up call to a parliament that some serious thought needed to go into what was to be done. It did not happen.

The government expanded bilingual positions across the country and offered more language training.

The reason the language programs did not quell separatist sentiment was because of the failure to really look at what was happening and the Secretary of State which is largely filled with Francophones could not see the problem as they had all mastered both languages. Although the programs under the Official Language Act filled a large number of government positions with people who were bilingual, there was an inherent problem which excluded most Canadians whether Anglophone or Francophone.

The problem lay in who passed the tests and got those jobs. For example with the English proficiency test Francophones from eastern Quebec rarely passed. The candidates who were most successful were from New Brunswick or eastern or northern Ontario or west Quebec where the communities were bilingual and children learned it from interaction with their community. The other successful candidates were in situations where one parent spoke both languages and passed it on to their children. Quebecers who felt excluded were right; they were excluded by and large. Having a warm body in a bilingual position is not enough, the country needs to be fully represented.

The Argument that Quebec needs to have Bill C-13 to protect the French language is no longer valid.

There was a time when English was predominant and French speaking people were at a disadvantage. This is no longer the case. The highest income earners in Quebec are Francophones. What has happened is the Quebec government has used this excuse to blame Anglophones for many problems they faced before the "Quiet Revolution". It was no accident that Anglophones got ahead especially the ones who were not Catholics. It is pretty hard to feed and give a good education to a family when Quebecers had on average 8 children with many having far more. As long as they adhered to the Catholic religion it was their moral duty to have as many children as they could. They were also expected to donate 10% of their income to the church which also ran the schools and any social services there were. This practice also kept a lot of the Irish in Quebec and other parts of the country from getting ahead for many years. The catholic schools, which I also attended, frowned upon businesses and the only really acceptable professions outside the clergy were Law and Medicine. Wealthy businessmen who donated a lot to the church were the exception. Duplessis and his government supported this view and did not have high schools in many smaller centres so going beyond grade school was out of the question for a huge part of the population. This policy affected the Anglophone community as well and it was to some extent brought to light by a story in the Star Weekly Newspaper in the 1950s that showed many francophones and anglophones outside even small villages in Quebec were as backward in terms of education and sophistication as the Hillbillies in the Appalachian mountains. The school boards soon built large regional high schools and bused students long distances to be exposed to better education and a wider view of the world.

The Separatists wanted equality with their English neighbours but it soon went beyond that. They wanted a separate country. Canada's attempts to change that narrative failed miserably because they did not take the time to really listen to what was being said in Quebec and to correct the idea that their all problems were the fault of the English. Quebec city used to be 50% Anglophone and western Quebec was originally mostly settled by Irish and Scottish peasants facing persecution in Great Britain. The rich who were mostly from Great Britain or the US misused all of the population to a great extent especially in the 19th century when there were no laws to limit the rights of the "robber Barons". The policies of the Separatist Quebec government drove many Anglophones out of the province and at the same time reduced the status of Montreal as the preeminent city in the country.

If you listen carefully to what Premier Legault is saying is that he is concerned that people in Montreal **do not speak French at home** but most of them do speak French on the job. The language they are using is not necessarily English and most immigrants tend to use their first language at home and it has almost always been like that. Their children change this pattern as they wish to be integrated into French society. The requirement that new immigrants learn French in 6 months is as good as barring them from Quebec as almost no one can learn a language that quickly. Over the last 200 years it has been the children of immigrants who learn French or English fluently and blend into society.

There is supposed to be freedom of movement in the country but with the many restrictions the Quebec language laws impose this may no longer be a reality.

Mr Legault is a charming fatherly figure and I watched him during the daily televised Covid reports on CTV which were far better than anything anywhere in Canada . He assured the population that everything was being looked after even as the province had the highest death rate in the country from Covid. He has the same charm as Erdogan in Turkey and Victor Orban in Hungary and other populist leaders are trampling on individual freedoms and democracy and creating a historical narrative which claims they were victims of oppression with respect to any transgressions they made and have a glorious past which should be revived. The same narrative is playing out in the US.

Mr Legault' assurances to anglophones are falling on deaf ears as we can watch what was happening in the rest of the country on English channels outside Quebec and could see that in spite of the assurances he gave Quebecers, more of the Quebec population was dying of Covid than in the rest of the country

I was affected personally by this Separatist narrative history.

My husband was an English speaking patient who was neglected in a Quebec hospital which left him a quadriplegic who was unable to speak. The case never went to court because the evidence against the doctor and hospital was all in their records which they could not deny and suffice to say that the 7 figure settlement I got which I am not permitted to disclose indicates who was at fault.

Two of my children and I have dyslexia which I have and neither of them could get out of high school today under the proposed legislation even though both are university graduates with successful careers. I studied Neurolinguistics to discover why there was a problem learning languages especially writing and it is because their brains process language in different parts of the brain than the rest of the population and some brain centres did not function in this area as well.

The Harvard University team which did the seminal research on Dyslexia was able to outline the nature and extent of it especially with respect to writing. They showed that it can affect up to 20% of the population. **One of the groups most affected by dyslexia are Engineers and Computer programmers** who will go into those fields because computer language and math used in those studies are not as affected by the part of the brain which limits their writing skills. These potential students may leave the province or never reach their potential which is a great loss to the province. And as a footnote 15 % of prison populations have been found to be people with dyslexia who could not succeed in school and later in life.

Until recently students in English CEGEP had to take one course in French but did not have to pass it to graduate. Most students could succeed because each student took a placement test first and those who

had not been able to learn the language would be in a beginner class. My children could navigate this step and went on to successfully complete university.

My grandchildren who are bilingual, starting with French daycare, fear the three written courses which they will now have to take in French will put them at a disadvantage going to university as their marks in these courses are likely to lower their overall averages compared with students who receive all their education in French. This will harm them even if they are going to a University outside Quebec.

Dyslexia can sometimes give you an advantage. It gives you an amazing ability to take in a huge amount of information and see the issues clearly. With land claims there could be 5 feet of documents and I could clearly see the issues at stake and plan how to address them.

Linkedin now allows you to list Dyslexia as one of your special skills.

Francophones will be the greatest losers. Anglophones can always leave the province but with restrictions on even private schools teaching in English many will not have the skills to study in other provinces and unions for groups like nurses and teachers will have little room to maneuver as their membership will eventually be trapped by insufficient language skills to move elsewhere. Nurses and doctors may no longer be able to seek higher salaries in the rest of Canada or the US for that matter, The better off part of the population will send their children to private schools in another province or hire private tutors.

In some areas like science and computer programming most of the advanced work is being done in English and Francophone students will be shut out. Even in France students can go to private English schools to improve their language skills.

The promises of the Quebec government that health services in English will not be affected rings hollow as fewer and fewer medical graduates will be able to speak English.

The struggle between experts with particular skills who cannot learn French is still going on and some senior people will not even hear of making an exception even if the objectives of the department are less likely to be met. The new government policies will exacerbate this situation.

Francophone students are not fleeing the province now as financial rewards are not the only incentive for taking a job but language and culture are often even more important to individuals.

None of the Federal party leaders want to take on this matter as they are all afraid of losing seats in Quebec.

Canada has become a wealthy and an open society because it has welcomed people from all over the world and encouraged language and cultural diversity and Bill C-13 will reverse that progress in Quebec.

I have great affection and admiration of Francophone women, some who are now members of my family. I especially admire older Quebec women who had to fight off the burden of a repressive religion and a culture which tied them to a life of endless toil raising too many children and they were far ahead of their English counterparts in gaining women's rights.

If you care about the future of Anglophones and Francophones in Quebec you will not include the clause which adopts the Quebec Charter of rights which limits individual rights now and can do even more so in the future.

Yours sincerely

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