ENGLISH LANGUAGE RIGHTS IN QUEBEC AND DEFINING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE CANADIAN

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This special edition of *Canadian Diversity*, published in partnership with the Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) and entitled, Shifting Landscapes: English-Speaking Quebec and the *Official Languages Act*, looks at the English-speaking minority community in Quebec and its relation to the Act.

If you are an English-speaking Quebecer feeling beleaguered or bewildered by on-going language controversies; if you are curious about the history of your minority language community; or simply wanting to know more about language rights and policies, this issue is a must-read. If you are not an English-speaking Quebecer, but are interested in the way in which the defence of minority language communities has helped define Canada, you will find this edition both thought-provoking and educational.

QCGN President Geoffrey Chambers' foreword sets the stage by highlighting the vital role played by the *Official Languages Act* in the shaping and survival of our "national pan-Canadian collective project". Divided into four sections, the issue then considers different aspects of this fundamental proposition.

The first section, *Shifting Landscapes*, gives us an overview of the complex history that provides a context and explanation for our current reality. Full of interesting historical anecdotes, David Johnston maps the evolving vision of successive Official Language commissioners, tracing the transformation – in perception at least – of the English language community in Quebec from privileged representatives of a larger majority to a fragile minority in need of protection.

Through his compelling account of F. R. Scott's vision of Canada, former commissioner Graham Fraser recounts both the successes and failures of this larger than life figure. In the end, it is Scott's legacy we are left with, his clarity of thought in defining language rights as human rights, a principle that endures and continues to guide us to this day.

While also taking an historical approach, the second duo of articles considers the way minority language communities have contributed to *Our Vision of Canada*. Citing linguistic duality as a fundamental Canadian value, QCGN's Director General, Sylvia Martin-Laforge, points to the distinctive challenges faced by English-speaking Quebecers compared to their Francophone counterparts in the rest of Canada, evoking the need for equitable rather than identical treatment to allow each of the language minorities a truly equal voice.

Camille Harper's historical treatment describes some hard-fought battles in the linguistic arena and, like Martin-Laforge, emphasizes the accomplishment of the Act in championing the equal value of both official language groups no matter whether they live as majority or minority groups in their respective communities.

The articles in the third section, *The Official Languages Act as a Tool for English-speaking Quebecers*, also allude to the way in which the protection of minority language rights has defined Canada, and recommend that the Act be understood by the English-speaking minority in Quebec as a valuable resource that must be more fully espoused and made use of. Taking his responsibility as an English-speaking Member of Parliament to heart, Anthony Housefather has adopted the role of spokesperson and defender of the community's interests in Ottawa. Remarking on the diversity of needs within the English language community in Quebec, he encourages all English-speaking Quebecers to learn more about the Act in order to put it to best use as a legal protection of their vitality and development.

Referring to her youth in 1990s Quebec in the shadow of acrimonious language politics, lawyer Marion Sandilands feels that many Anglo-Quebecers may be conditioned to see language as a space where competition reigns. Like Housefather, she encourages them to educate themselves about the rights and entitlements conferred by the Act and familiarize themselves with the vision it champions – one in which the vitality of the two minority language communities is seen as a positive for all concerned.

In the fourth and final section, Jack Jedwab, president and CEO of the Association for Canadian Studies, makes us aware in his two studies of *The Imperative to Define and Educate*. The task of defining who makes up the English language community in Quebec is as complex as it is vitally essential – particularly in the context of the growing numbers of people of mixed linguistic heritage who need to be better accounted for in our language policies, planning, and politics.

In his second article, Jedwab studies self-assessed knowledge of the *Official Languages Act* and of the rights accorded therein. He regrets the failure of history curricula to educate about this vital piece of legislation, concluding with the need to ensure that Quebecers – and indeed all Canadians – gain a better understanding of official language minority communities and the essential role they have played in our country's history.

This special edition on language rights touches on history, law, philosophy and society, but it is ultimately about our vision of Canada and the way linguistic duality has shaped that vision. Perhaps we can return to Chambers' foreword to sum things up: "the *Official Languages Act* has performed a vital service... in the evolution of this inspiring, exemplary, and successful project of human civilization we call Canada... It is needed."