THE IMPACT OF THE COMMISSION ON BILINGUALISM AND BICULTURALISM ON FRANCOPHONE MINORITY COMMUNITIES IN CANADA

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ABSTRACT

The following article presents some of the reflections and analyses that were made about the situation of Francophones living outside of Quebec by the Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. It reveals that commissioners, and André Laurendeau in particular, have shown a great deal of sensitivity towards these minorities. The text takes a look at the main recommendations made by the B&B Commission on official minority-language education. The B&B was the very first time an inquiry was set up to consider the situation of French in contemporary Canada and constituted a crucial step in mending past wrongs made in Francophone minority settings.

"The English are used to dominate:
I have never felt it more."
André Laurendeau, *Journal* 1990 [1964]: 67. (traduction)

"So when did I realize for the first time
that I was, in my country, of a species to be treated inferiorly?"
Gabrielle Roy, *La détresse et l'enchantement* (1984: exergue) (traduction)

The history of francophone communities outside of Quebec is marked by milestones, most of them unfortunate ones – consider, as an example, the day the English-speaking provinces adopted measures limiting the use of French during legislative assemblies or in schools (Aunger, 2005; 2001). This, however, did happen before the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (B&B Commission) was created in 1963. From that turning point onwards, the Canadian linguistic system has been through many major changes and the situation of Canada's francophone minorities outside of Quebec has begun to improve. Canada had finally started shaking off its listless stance on language rights, in which it had been immersed for nearly a hundred years.

In this article, we would like to take a look, even if only a brief one, at some of the reflections and analyses that were made about the situation of francophone minorities by the B&B Commission. We believe such a goal to be more than necessary considering that ever since Canada was founded, this was the first time a Royal Commission was put in place in order to consider the situation of its French-speaking population. The Commission's intention was to hear this community out and have a better understanding of the state the country was in. Since the historiography of the B&B Commission and its impact on Francophones living outside of Quebec is virtually non-existent, we write our article with a programmatic intent. The emphasis placed on the relationship between Francophone communities in and outside of Quebec during the Estates General of French Canada in 1967 relegated the work done by the Commission to the background. Yet, two commissioners came from francophone minority communities: father Clément Cormier, founder of the University of Moncton, and Professor Paul Wyscynski, cofounder and director of the Centre de recherche en civilisation canadienne-française at the University of Ottawa. Although he was of Polish descent, professor Wyscynski was a historian and a specialist of French-Canadian literature, with a particular interest in Émile Nelligan, François Xavier-Garneau and Albert Laberge. This 50th anniversary gives us the opportunity to be reminded of their involvement with the Commission.

We encourage readers to revisit documents written at that time and to scrutinize archives and memoirs in order to better gauge the importance and the impact of this Commission on francophone communities. Throughout this article, we attempt to offer a few comments, ideas and avenues for further exploration.

THE WORK DONE BY THE B&B COMMISSION IN FRANCOPHONE MINORITY SETTINGS

The B&B's mandate was to investigate the state of bilingualism and biculturalism in Canada, to recommend guidelines aiming to promote bilingualism in public and private institutions, to foster a better understanding of Canada's bicultural character and to promote bilingualism amongst Canadians. On top of having received and analyzed 400 briefs (Laurendeau, 1990: 46), the commissioners crisscrossed the country and met with people from French speaking minority communities from diverse backgrounds – students, teachers, business people, religious and community leaders, Francophones and francophiles. André Laurendeau comments on his meetings in his Journal, thus revealing his great sensitivity towards francophone minorities.

Linguistic insecurity in minority communities can bring about behaviours that are at times very contradictory. Laurendeau was fascinated with how Francophones viewed bilingualism; he was perplexed by Acadians from Prince-Edward Island telling him that the language situation was alright when it was not the case; in New-Brunswick, where he was witnessing the awakening of Acadian identity, he observed that the Acadian people's ambitions remained quite modest. As he points it out in his Journal (1990:76), Acadians accept "the notion of all Francophones being bilingual as a normal ideal". However, in Ontario, he is surprised to find a completely different situation. Franco-Ontarians, especially the ones living in Windsor and Sudbury, have a very negative stance on bilingualism. In their opinion, bilingualism inevitably leads to the impoverishment of the French language.

Furthermore, he rarely comments in his Journal on the briefs submitted by representatives from Francophone associations, except for the submission by the Association canadienne française d'éducation de l'Ontario (ACFÉO), which he found to be too subdued. On February 27th 1964, B&B commissioners met with Bishop Demers of the ACFÉO at the Cercle universitaire d'Ottawa. Laurendeau observed that Bishop Demers appeared to be afraid of causing any trouble to federal commissioners by addressing the issue of education, given that this issue fell under provincial jurisdiction. However, Laurendeau considered education as the essential element in resisting assimilation for minority-language communities. Laurendeau willingly recognized the role the University of Moncton played in the Acadian renaissance. Moreover, a certain complicity had

developed between him and Father Cormier, the founder of that institution.

And lastly, Laurendeau (1990: 59) admitted of having been disappointed by his meeting with Robarts and his Ministry of Education. Laurendeau's views aligned better with Prime Minister Robicheau of New Brunswick. However, neither one of them agreed to submit a brief to the B&B Commission. Robicheau considered the topic was too sensitive. As for Robarts, he claimed that a sovereign government could not intervene in initiatives undertaken by another sovereign government. It should be noted that this argument did not really convince Laurendeau (1990: 59).

THE RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE B&B COMMISSION AND FRANCOPHONE MINORITIES OUTSIDE OF QUEBEC

As much as he was struck by the linguistic insecurities of Francophones outside of Quebec, Laurendeau also took note of their militancy and admitted that he was troubled by the hostility his presence seemed to awaken in Anglophones. The latter considered his efforts as nothing more than support towards separatism. Laurendeau writes: "But the thing is, being rooted in a certain culture implies a minimum of separation (from another culture). Similarly, someone who wants to have a personal life, especially when it comes to some kind of inner life, feels that he cannot belong uniquely to his public functions and fellow citizens." (1990, 195). It is not surprising to find in the B&B's second volume many recommendations intended to reinforce education in French outside of Quebec. The first recommendation concerns the right of parents to be able to choose the official language they want their children to be schooled in. Thus, the following passage is found in the second volume (1967: 146):

> *Our first recommendation follows logically from the principle of the moral right of Canadian parents to have their children educated in the official language of their choice and from the definition of the bilingual districts (which ensures that the number of students affected will justify the provision of minority language schools). We recommend that public education be provided in each of the official minority languages at both the elementary and secondary levels in the bilingual districts.*

Commissioners contemplated creating bilingual districts. That project was dropped, but the idea of providing official minority language education was maintained. It was considered that establishing these kinds of schools was an essential step in order to restore a certain amount of linguistic security for francophone minority communities. This is also the reason why B&B commissioners asked provincial governments to make sure that these schools "acquaint students with their cultural heritage" (Commission, 1967: 154). The commissioners also believed that these types of schools in Quebec, Ontario and New Brunswick, should fall "under the direction of an administrator at the associate or assistant deputy minister level, and that this administrator be provided with an adequate staff and budget" (Commission, 1967: 174) and "that a school board shall include representatives of both majority-language and official minority-language schools whenever the board has both kinds of schools under its jurisdiction" (Commission, 1967: 171).

The B&B Commission also made a significant number of recommendations on training programs for teachers all over the country, from the Maritimes all the way to the Western provinces, and on higher education in the official minority language. Probably inspired by the University of Moncton, the B&B Commission recommended that "French-language education at the university level be provided for the Francophone minority whenever the potential enrolment makes it feasible to do so." (Commission, 1967: 182). It also recommended that "the University of Ottawa and Laurentian University give priority to increasing the number of degree programmes offered in French (Commission, 1967: 184)". The Commission also made a number of recommendations aimed at promoting second-language instruction and suggested that a research council on languages should be created.

The various recommendations made concerned all levels of schooling, from preschool to university. A substantial number of them stressed the need for second-language teaching. Some serious change had to be brought about at the time; past errors in French language education had to be corrected and measures had to be taken in order for the language to remain relevant outside of Quebec. The challenge undertaken by Laurendeau was to provide Francophones outside of Quebec the necessary conditions to attain a sense of linguistic security through education.

THE IMPACT OF THE B&B COMMISSION ON MINORITY FRANCOPHONE COMMUNITIES

Laurendeau and the other B&B commissioners concluded their analysis of the French language situation outside of Quebec by stating that "overall, however, we have been convinced that the spokespeople from minority French communities have faith in the survival of the French culture despite the difficult conditions it is sometimes faced with (Commission B&B, 1965: 73)". At that time, some provinces had already started setting up measures in order to support a greater openness towards their francophone minorities. Thus, in 1965 in Ontario, Robarts set up an Advisory Committee on French Language Services in order to provide services in French to its French-speaking population. He also authorized the use of French in Ontario's legislative assembly. Around that time, the University of Ottawa adopted the 1965 University of Ottawa Act, through which it committed itself to "promote the development of bilingualism and biculturalism, and to protect and develop French culture in Ontario". In 1967, Robarts' government allowed the set-up of French public high schools – they were however faced with some resistance from existing school boards, all Anglophone, who were opposed to the idea.

The B&B Commission should also be acknowledged for inspiring the creation of second language immersion programs in the 1970s. These programs were created with the goal to foster Canadian unity. Not only do these programs still exist nowadays all over Canada, but the University of Ottawa finally created the first immersion program at the university level in 2009. To this day, more than 1 000 students from all over the country have taken part in this new program.

Despite these achievements, Ontario refused to sign on to official bilingualism, which was a recommendation made by the B&B, and preferred maintaining the Anglophone character of the province and providing services in French when the numbers warrant it. As for New Brunswick, it became an officially bilingual province in 1968, one year before the Official Languages Act was adopted by the Canadian Parliament. This federal act, however, was not specifically designed with francophone minorities outside of Quebec in mind. It was mostly designed as a measure to address the concerns of Francophones living in Quebec; and it has, in fact, been conducive to the government of Quebec's decision to make French the official language of the province. Then, in 1977, the adoption of the Charter of the French Language confirmed once and for all that French, and not bilingualism, was the central element of Québécois identity. In the meantime, in the Western provinces, the battle over French went on. In 1979, nearly 100 years after having been revoked, French-language rights in the legislative assembly in Manitoba were reinstated following the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada in the Forest case. And finally, in 1982, when the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was adopted, a section was specifically included to address minority language educational rights (section 23), responding to the need highlighted by the B&B Commission to find solutions to the situation of French minorities outside of Quebec.

Of course, these various consequences are not all direct results of the recommendations made by the B&B, but we believe they emerged as a prolongation of the work that was started by the latter. However, the project of revitalizing the French language outside of Quebec, 50 years after the B&B Commission, remains a work-in-progress. Despite the adoption of the Official Languages Act and the federal government's funding of activities held in official minority languages, it is only in 1988, with the passing of the new Official Languages Act, that the Canadian government took on the responsibility of ensuring the vitality and the development of its official language minorities. Moreover, more than 15 years had to pass for the first action plan designed to promote official languages in Canada to be presented (in 2003). Laurendeau would have probably agreed that francophone minorities could benefit from some renewed support, although he would have wondered, rightfully so, if these efforts are not coming a bit too late. Nevertheless, every five years since 2003, the Canadian government has been releasing what has come to be known as a roadmap on official languages which provides a number of initiatives meant to support the development of official language minorities. The latest roadmap was published in March 2013.

CONCLUSION

The B&B Commission primarily focused on bilingualism. Debates around defining concepts such as biculturalism were largely inconclusive, and this to the point where the latter was eventually overshadowed by the notion of multiculturalism. Regardless, bilingualism in francophone minority settings often did not have good

press. It has often been considered as being a pretext used in order to deny Francophones their rights to have access to services in their mother tongue. That being said, Laurendeau probably did not suspect at the time that bilingualism would become a big part of the identity of Francophones in minority settings. This idea divides the francophone research community as well. Should bilingualism be regarded as an added value or a prelude to assimilation? In any case, up to now, solutions to linguistic insecurities of francophone minorities outside of Quebec have stemmed more from a bicultural approach than from a bilingual one. Indeed, the implementation of homogeneous French institutions such as unilingual French schools should not be mistaken as part of the B&B Commission's bilingual approach given that one of the obvious consequences of these schools has been their role in reinforcing Canadian biculturalism. Even if discussions around biculturalism have been dropped indefinitely by every government since Trudeau, this debate will eventually have to be reopened. Biculturalism is an unfinished project and an idea that remains as strong today as it was in 1963.

NOTES

1 For a more complete examination of Ontario's linguistic regime, see Cardinal and Normand (2011).

2 Matthew Hayday (2005).

3 For a synthesis of the debate, Deveau, Allard and Landry.

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