OFFICIAL BILINGUALISM IN CANADA AND THE PLANNED DECLINE OF THE ENGLISH-SCHOOL SYSTEM IN QUEBEC

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It is time that the institutions of the English-speaking community universities and schools, hospitals and other agencies – be accorded an assured future; that they be recognized as two-language institutions with a noble record of contributing to Quebec society. It is time that Anglophones of all origins be admissible to English-language schools; their small additional numbers will be significant for those schools and a negligible deprivation for the much larger French-speaking system. It is time that the French-speaking majority, concerned about their demographics, recognizes that English-speaking Quebecers are equally concerned about theirs. It is time for fairness.

Victor Goldbloom, 2015, pg. 189; Minister of the Quebec National Assembly,1970–1979; Commissioner of Official Languages,1991–1999.

Canada's *Official Languages Act* of 1969 played an important role in promoting the status of French-English bilingualism especially for Francophone minorities in the rest of Canada (ROC) and for the Anglophone minority within Quebec. Of special interest in this essay is the role of Quebec language planning within an officially bilingual Canada. Adopted in 1977, the *Charter of the French language* (Bill 101) was instrumental in enshrining the status and use of French relative to English in Quebec (Bourhis & Sioufi, 2017). Today, as many as 95% of the Quebec population command a knowledge of French sufficient to carry a conversation. Bill 101 also helped maintain French mother tongue speakers at 80% of the Quebec population: 4.8 million speakers in 1971 and 6.2 million speakers by the 2016 census. However, pro-French laws and other factors contributed to the decline of the English

mother tongue minority from 13% of the population in 1971 (789k) to 7.5% in 2016 (601k). Increased immigration to Quebec had a role in increasing the proportion of speakers who have neither French nor English as a mother tongue, known as Allophones. Their proportion increased from 6.3% of the population in 1971 (390k) to 13.3% of the population in 2016 (over 1 million). Individual bilingualism is on the rise in Quebec. French mother tongue bilinguals increased from 25.6% in 1971 to 38.6% in 2016. In 1971, only 37% of English-mother tongue Anglophones were French-English bilinguals; by 2016, as many as 69% of Anglophones were bilingual. Amongst Allophones, French-English bilingualism increased from 33% in 1971 to 50% in 2016. These Quebec bilingual trends do contribute to the French-English bilingual status of Canada.

The preamble of Bill 101 asserted that its pro-French legislation would be conducted in fairness while being respectful of the institutions of the English-speaking community of Quebec, whose valuable contributions to the development of Quebec was recognized. Despite such assurances, Bill 101 had the intended effect of decreasing the institutional vitality of the English-speaking communities of Québec (ESCQ) in health and social services, in primary and secondary education, municipalities, the economy and linguistic landscape (Bourhis, 2012, 2017, 2019; Oakes & Warren, 2007; Vaillancourt, 2018).

A pillar of Bill 101 was the provision that forced Francophones and international immigrants settled in Quebec to send their children only to French schools (Paillé, 2019). Quebec Government laws including Bill 22, Bill 101, Bill 104 and Bill 115 successfully restricted immigrant, Allophone and Francophone access to English schools, while only Quebec Anglophone "rights holders" were allowed to attend English schools (Bourhis & Foucher, 2012). Bill 101 stipulated that Anglophone pupils could attend English schools as "rights holders" only if one parent had spent most of his or her primary schooling in English within Quebec. Following court challenges to broaden access to English schools, the Canadian Supreme court ruled that access to English school was possible for "rights holders" if one parent had spent most of his or her primary schooling in English anywhere in Canada.

What impact did language laws restricting access to English schools have on the size of the English school system in Quebec? In 1971 before the adoption of Bill 101, there were 255,205 pupils enrolled in English primary and secondary schools in the combined public and private systems of Quebec, our 100% enrollment baseline for the purpose of this analysis. By 2018, Ministry of education data showed there were only 96,235 pupils left in the English school system representing only 37.5% of the original 1971 baseline, a drop of 158,970 pupils. Such a decline, due to a low birthrate among Quebec Anglophones, outmigration and restricted access to English schools, forced English school boards to make cuts in school budgets, while having to rule on painful school mergers and closures (Lamarre, 2012). Elected English school board commissioners were tasked with adopting unpopular decisions forcing distraught pupils who lost their schools to travel further afield to attend merged English schools. By 2017, there were 273 English schools within nine English school boards in Quebec, some covering regions of provincial territory the size of Belgium, thus making access to remote English schools difficult for their pupils (ABEE, 2018).

As might be expected, the decline of the French school system was less pronounced, given that Québec Francophone, Allophone and immigrant pupils must attend French schools, thus partly compensating for the declining birthrate of the Francophone majority. In 1971, Ministry of Education data showed that 1,378,788 pupils were enrolled in the French primary and secondary schools in the combined public/private systems, our 100% baseline. However by 2018, there were 943,381 pupils in the French school system, a drop of 435,400 pupils amounting to 68.4% of the original 1971 baseline enrollment. Thanks to its critical mass of pupils, 63 French School boards oversee a network of 2,023 French schools across Quebec, offering a complete range of programs and services for its pupils. However the French school system suffers from a lack of qualified teachers to replace those who retire or leave the profession due to burnout and low pay. The influx of immigrants in French schools contributes to overcrowding in many Montreal inner-city schools. In 2019, the current Education minister forced the transfer of Montreal English schools to French school boards, while blaming English school boards for "hanging on" to their historical schools now underused because of the government's own laws restricting access to English schools.

Ministry of Education data showed that the number of English mother tongue pupils studying in the English school system dropped from 171,175 in 1971 to only 52,500 in 2018, a loss of 118,675 Anglophone pupils amounting to only 30.6% of their original enrollment in 1971. This drop in Anglophone pupils was felt most dramatically in schools across outlying regions of the province which do not benefit from the larger Anglophone student base found in the west-island and inner-city Montreal.

In 2018, only 73.1% of all Anglophones pupils in the province were attending English schools. Ministry of Education data shows that an increasing proportion of Anglophone pupils are attending French primary and secondary schools. While in 1971 only 9.5% of all Anglophones pupils in the province attended French schools (17,924), results in 2018 showed that 26.9% (19,387) did so. Many Anglophone parents choose to send their children to French schools to improve their mastery of the local Québécois French accent and culture hoping that their bilingual children will eventually find jobs and settle in the province rather than move to the ROC. Some Anglophone parents also send their children to French schools because these are often closer to home than faraway English schools on long bus rides.

Education ministry data also shows that as planned by Bill 101, the number of Allophones studying in the English school system dropped from 56,376 in 1971 to only 12,144 in 2018, amounting to 21% of the original 1971 baseline enrollment. Results also show that of all Allophones enrolled in the Quebec school system, as many as 85.4% attended English schools in 1971, while that proportion dropped to only 13.4% by 2018. Conversely, Ministry of Education data shows that while only 14.6% of Allophone pupils in the Quebec school system attended French schools in 1971 (9,652) before Bill 101, as many as 91.4% of all Allophone pupils in the province were attending French schools by 2018 (128,361). These figures attest to the efficiency of Bill 101 in shifting Allophones and international immigrants from the English to the French school

system in Quebec.

Education Ministry data showed there were 28,700 Francophones enrolled in the English school system across the Province in 1971, while this number fluctuated across the decades and dropped to 17,591 by 2018. While only 2.1% of all Francophones enrolled in the Quebec School system attended English schools in 1971, this percentage remained steady at 2.5% by 2018, attesting to the efficiency of Bill 101 in limiting Francophone access to English schools. Francophone enrollments in English schools reflect French-English mixed marriages in the province. Many mixed French/English language couples do exert their "rights holders" option by sending their children to English schools. Such choices reflect the widespread desire of many Francophone and Allophone parents to send their children to English schools to become bilingual. A Quebec-wide representative poll showed that 61% of Francophones and 67% of Allophones wished to obtain better access to the English school system for their children (*La Presse*, May 12, 2010).

English schools in Quebec provide quality French teaching for their pupils through ever-popular French immersion programs. In 2006, 66% of pupils in English schools were enrolled in French immersion classes, a trend increasing to 83% by 2011 (ABEE, 2018). At the secondary school level, 35% of pupils in English schools were enrolled in French immersion classes in 2006, a proportion increasing to 65% by 2011. English schools provide English-French medium teaching that succeeds in training the most bilingual pupils across the Quebec school system. This is reflected in Ministry of Education final provincial exams showing that pupils in the secondary English school system of the two largest inner-city Montreal English school boards obtained scores in French that were slightly higher (93% & 92%) than those obtained on the same exams by pupils in the two largest French school boards of inner-city Montreal (84% & 88%; Jennings, 2015). Clearly, English Schools do contribute to the strength and quality of the French language by training highly competent bilingual Anglophone pupils. Education Ministry data also showed that six of the nine English school boards of Quebec were amongst the top ten performing boards on academic performance, while 4 of the 63 French school boards were in this top 10 leagues across the province. Ministry of Education figures also showed that while high school graduation rates were at 75% in French school boards across the province, graduation rates in English school boards were at 85%, attesting to the strong performance of English schools despite decades of institutional attrition (Jennings, 2015).

Bill 101 was successful in keeping 97.5% of all Francophone pupils in the province within French schools in 2018, a percentage virtually unchanged since 1971 (97.9%). However we have seen that the number of Francophone pupils enrolled in the French school system did drop during this period. In effect, legislating Francophones, Allophones and immigrants to access only French schools could not offset the low birth rate of the Francophone majority (birth rate: 1.4-1.6), resulting in the gradual decline in absolute number of pupils enrolled in the French school system.

These results show that Bill 101 and related laws have achieved their goal of restricting access to English schools regardless of the success of such schools in fostering the academic and French

proficiency of their pupils. Such restrictive laws contributed to the erosion of the English school system, which remains mostly funded by the Canadian Federal government through general transfer payments to the Quebec Government with little accountability. With a net outmigration to the ROC of over 310,000 Anglophones from 1971 to 2016, the English school system cannot count on English-speaking "rights holders" from the ROC to improve enrollments in Quebec English schools, while international immigrants remain banned from English schools. Over decades, the steady drop in the absolute number of pupils enrolled in the English school system had the intended effect of forcing the closure of English schools, thus reducing the number of teachers, administrators and staff employed in such institutions, further contributing to the overall net out-migration of Anglophones and Allophones to the ROC that endures in Canadian census data (Bourhis, 2019).

Despite pleas by Anglophone community leaders to allow immigrants from English-speaking countries such as the US, the UK and India to access English schools (ABEE, 2018; Goldbloom, 2015), Quebec Governments have remained adamant in excluding Anglophone or Allophone immigrants from attending the English school system. For many Francophones and elected members of the Quebec government, the planned decline of the English school system is seen as a justifiable measure, given the imperative of sustaining enrollment in its own French majority school system and ensuring the linguistic assimilation of immigrants and Allophones to the Francophone rather than to the Anglophone host communities in the province.

During the 2018 provincial election campaign, the Quebec Liberal Party promised it would not abolish the nine English school boards, following representations by Anglophone advocacy groups that such school boards represent one of the last domains of governance fully controlled by and for the ESCQ. As it turns out, it is the nationalist party Coalition Avenir Quebec (CAQ) that won the Quebec elections, receiving 37% of the popular vote from mostly Francophone regions of the province, thus gaining a comfortable majority in the National Assembly. As proposed in its electoral platform, the CAQ Minister of Education is proposing the abolition of French and English school boards in the autumn of 2019. School boards are to be replaced by local school-based service centres across the province subjected to direct centralized control by the Ministry of Education based in Quebec City. As an official language minority of Canada, English-speaking advocacy groups such as the QCGN invoked article 23 of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and Canadian Supreme court rulings (e.g., Mahe v. Alberta) to plead that "minority language communities have the right to control and manage the educational facilities in which their children are taught both to ensure and enable our language and culture to flourish... They (the boards) are vital to the very survival and identity of our English-speaking community." (*Montreal Gazette*, December 14, 2018).

Faced with the power of the French majority government to legislate within its education jurisdiction, it is no wonder that the English-speaking communities of Quebec feel they must rely on the protection of Article 23 of the *Charter of Rights* and the spirit of Canada's *Official Languages Act* to limit the planned decline of their historical school system including their English school boards.

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