

Even in Canada though, individual rights and legal equality are secondary to certain criteria that fall within the concept of territoriality. One cannot expect to receive the same services in French in Vancouver that would be available in Ottawa, or the same service in English in Rimouski that one would receive in Montreal. In other words, the services provided by the federal government to Canadians in the language of their choice are limited by considerations of geography and demand.

These are the legislative and policy structures that sustain the Canadian effort to achieve language reform. I should add that the new Charter of Rights and Freedoms included in the Constitution of 1982 enshrines in the founding statute of Canada most of the provisions I have just described as being part of the Official Languages Act. As you know, the repatriation of the Constitution was a subject of much controversy in Canada, to say the least, especially in Quebec. But this is another subject altogether.

I have outlined the structures for you, but where do we stand in reality? What have we accomplished and what are the prospects for the future?

In order to answer these questions, we have to understand what is meant by the term "bilingualism". It is not a question of individual bilingualism, but one of official bilingualism. I do not expect all Canadians to be able to speak French and English equally well on the sidewalks of Edmonton or Montreal. Rather, it is a question of the government being able to provide its services in both languages.

What services are we talking about? Mainly, those at the federal level, within the institutions of the central government. This would include the legislature, the Parliament, the courts, the government departments and corporations, and the cultural institutions such as the state-run television and radio. Federal employees who speak the minority language should also be able to work in their language and to participate fully in the government which belongs to them as much as it does to the majority.

To this list I would add one significant provincial element, namely education. Without access to education in its own language, a minority language group has little chance of surviving.

Where do we now stand in regard to government services? What does the record of recent years indicate?

I feel that the record is relatively positive, and we are continuing to advance. Although there remains much to be done, 12 years after the adoption of the Official Languages Act, the federal administration is not the same institution it was before. More and more, Canadians are able to deal with the administration in their mother tongue. Participation by both language groups is more balanced. English and French are more respected than ever before in the Public Service. Provincially, although there are still some very serious shortcomings, it is a fact that access for the minority, especially the French-language minority, to education in its own language is substantially greater than it was 15 or 20 years ago.

All this, I should emphasize, does not mean that the battle has been won. Far from it. But I can say in all honesty that we are well on the way — and perhaps I am speaking here with the faith of a former Commissioner of Official Languages — and we have every likelihood of success.

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