

"Most of the complaints centred round lack of service of one kind or another in French. They included a grievance over the poverty of French in an advertisement and an account of difficulties and delay encountered in registering a pedigreed dog in French. In Ottawa, a new mother found that the hospital had no Family Allowance registration forms in French. . . ." *From the Third Annual Report of the Commissioner of Official Languages.*

Bilingualism

Bilingualism is a central fact of Canadian life. There are two major language groups, the English speakers and the French speakers, and if Canada is to remain a united country they must regard each other as equal citizens of a common land.

In 1969 Parliament passed the Official Languages Act. It was a long considered attempt to arrange a kind of official phonic equality — to make sure that all citizens, no matter which language they spoke, had equal access to education, to justice in the courts, to employment in the Public Service and to information from official sources. It was supported by all political parties and it was recognized as an effort of essential importance but enormous difficulty. Below are some excerpts from a bilingualism article which ran in Canada Today/D'Aujourd'hui in March, 1972, and below the excerpts is an updating from the recent Third Annual Report by Keith Spicer, the Commissioner of Official Languages. The goals of the Act still fall far short of achievement and the basic reasons are easy to find. In essence the Act asks that some persons who have lived contentedly in one language make an effort, sometimes slight but often formidable, to adjust to life with two.

THE PRESENT CANADIAN CONFEDERATION was formed in 1867. It was not precisely a marriage between cat and canary, but it was not an equal bargain, either. The British North America Act made French an official language, but in a way both unclear and limited. In effect, English would be the language of government, with some French translations.

The Public Service first was staffed by Parliamentary patronage, a system which at least insured a reasonable percentage of French-speaking public servants. In 1918 patronage was replaced by the Civil Service Commission. In the early 1940's a royal commission recommended that there be more Francophone participation in the Federal Government was dropped on the grounds that it would hurt the merit system. Even in the 1950's in New Brunswick, whose French-speaking minority was already approaching 48 per cent, it was considered politically dangerous to make Family Allowance cheques bilingual.

But unrest in Québec grew strong. The French Canadians had never had as much affection for Confederation as the English, and radicals in the province found more of a public ear for demands for a sovereign status for Québec, or separation. Among English-speaking Canadians, too, there were those who called for more recognition of the French fact.

In 1963 Prime Minister Lester Pearson said: "It is reasonable that French-speaking people should be able to use their own language." He established the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism.

In February, 1965, the Commission published a preliminary report, concluding that the country, without being fully conscious of the fact, was passing through its "greatest crisis".

The Royal Commission detailed economic, educational, and other social conditions of the Canadians of French expression and it said past inducements to make the Public Service bilingual had been insufficient.

"It is not enough to tell public servants that they may speak French if they wish; the whole milieu will have to be changed if the Public Service is to become a bilingual institution. At present, when a Francophone comes to work in a setting where English has always been the only language of work, he faces many difficulties and frustrations. He may find that there is no typewriter with French accents; the service personnel are likely to speak only English; most documents in circulation and publications in the library will probably be in English; and co-workers will almost all be unilingual Anglophones."

The Commission said changes must be made in the workings of the Government as drastic as the change from patronage to the merit systems.

Most dramatically, it recommended that the Government make parts of itself French, and that bilingual districts be established throughout Canada, and that "any province whose official-language minority reaches or exceeds 10 per cent declare that it recognizes French and English as official languages."

The Commission also recommended that each federal department (for example, State, External Affairs, Post Office, Transport) contain French