

language rights have been denied or abused by the federal authorities; to ensure compliance with the Act and measure progress toward linguistic reform; and to encourage a more open and positive attitude about the two official languages and the two major linguistic communities.

Promotion of language rights

The Federal Government's efforts to promote language rights in its institutions are part of a broader policy of official languages. The most prominent expression of this policy is a national broadcasting system that provides radio and television programming to Canadians in English and French. It also includes promotion — in consultation with the provinces — for the teaching of English and French. Other projects are designed to promote the social, cultural, and linguistic development of French- and English-speaking groups where they constitute minorities and to foster a better understanding between the two official language groups throughout the country.

Equality of status between the French and English languages does not mean that only these two languages will be spoken. The principle that every citizen has the right to speak any language remains sacrosanct; it is not the policy of the Federal Government to make all Canadians bilingual. For example, Saskatchewan and Alberta will probably remain predominantly English-speaking provinces; it is their small French-speaking minorities that the Act is designed to serve and protect.

Canada's bilingual history

The first permanent French settlement in Canada was established at Quebec in 1608 and the first British one at Cupids, Newfoundland in 1610. The new world populations of the two colonial powers grew and by the mid-eighteenth century stood at 80,000 French and two million British in all North America.

In 1763, following the surrender of the French territories in North America to the British after the Seven Years War and over the course of the next 100 years, the British policy toward the French-speaking minority in British North America was generally one of tolerance. Under the Union Act of 1840, the British Parliament provided that all documents of the Canadian Legislature

would have official value only in their English version. But the Legislature took steps to ensure that documents were translated into French and voted unanimously an Address to the Queen requesting that this provision of the Act be nullified; this was done by the British Parliament in 1848. The following year the speech from the throne to the Legislature of the United Canada was read by Lord Elgin in English and French.

In 1867 a federation of four original provinces (New Brunswick and Nova Scotia and the former constituent parts of United Canada: Ontario and Quebec) was created in British North America. British Columbia joined the federation in 1871, Prince Edward Island in 1873. Manitoba (1870), Saskatchewan and Alberta (1905) were subsequently created as provinces while Newfoundland joined in 1949.

BNA provided framework

Under the British North America (BNA) Act certain matters — including education — were left to the provincial governments. The BNA Act also established a framework for a growing equality of status between the French and English languages, which was exemplified by the Manitoba Act of 1870 that guaranteed the use of English and French in the Legislature and courts of the new province.

The BNA Act also guaranteed denominational schools, which were used as a means of protecting French educational rights. However, these educational and linguistic rights were struck down by the Manitoba Legislature in 1890. This setback, and similar ones in Ontario, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and the North-West Territories (which later became Saskatchewan and Alberta), created widespread dissatisfaction and have contributed to the tension that has existed between the two language groups.

An important milestone in language policy was the appointment in 1963, by the Government of Prime Minister Lester Pearson, of a Royal Commission to "inquire into and report upon the existing state of bilingualism and biculturalism in Canada and to recommend what steps should be taken to develop the Canadian Confederation on the basis of an equal partnership between the two founding races". The Commission issued a preliminary report which, while recognizing that strains are natural in a country where

cultures exist side by side, said that "Canada, without being fully conscious of the fact, is passing through the greatest crisis in its history".

Royal Commission

In a series of reports, the Royal Commission made recommendations in: official languages; the work world; education; the federal capital; the legislature and judiciary; voluntary associations; other ethnic groups; arts and letters; and the mass media. The recommendations were intended to create conditions that would foster a more equitable partnership between English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians.

A more favourable climate has gradually begun to emerge over the past few decades. The New Brunswick government, for example, has passed and promulgated an Official Languages Act establishing the equality of French and English in the Legislature, the courts, the Public Service and the educational system (35 per cent of the province's population is French-speaking). Ontario and Manitoba have also made progress in the provision of educational, health and social services for French-language minority groups. Quebec, meanwhile, enacted legislation in 1974 and 1977 making French the province's official language, while granting certain statutory rights to the English language.

Land for vets hospital

The Federal Government agreed recently to transfer to the province of Ontario, 246.5 acres of land in London, Ontario, to build a veterans hospital.

Under the transfer the needs related to health care of veterans are to receive first priority in the use of the land. This will enable the construction of a new chronic care facility, which would incorporate 290 federally-financed priority beds for veterans located on the Westminster Campus of the Victoria Hospital in London. The southern portion of the property will be designated as parkland, dedicated to the memory of Canada's veterans.

The federal hospital transfer policy, begun in 1963, authorized Veterans Affairs to withdraw from its hospital operations so that these hospitals would be integrated with community health services as a means of ensuring an ongoing high level of care for veterans.