

THE HIGH COST OF SPEAKING FRENCH

The first volume of the full report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism contains the following survey, which traces the relationship between ethnic origin and socio-economic position in Canada. The English press took no notice of it, but LE MAGAZINE MACLEAN published the following summary in October, 1968. From Canadian Dimension.

"The salaries of French Canadians — non agricultural, male — are 80 per cent of those made by Canadians of British origin, in Canada as a whole.

"The salaries of French Canadians in Quebec are 65 per cent of those of English Canadians in Quebec.

"Also, in the matter of occupations, French Canadians are found at the bottom of the list, immediately above Italians, both in Quebec and in the rest of the country.

"We think French Canadians perceive the differences in income (and in standard of living) and in occupation that distinguish them from Canadians of British origin.

"We think, equally, that such division of income along ethnic lines exercises a profound influence on the prevalent thinking about the future of Canada."

In these terms, three economists put their finger on the connections between the famous constitutional debate and "bread and butter" issues.

Why are French Canadians poorer? Is it education? Regional disparity? Discrimination? The answers will have a profound effect on the political and social positions of the communities in question.

In Canada, the factor which carries the most weight in explaining the unequal distribution of income is regional disparity. People are poorer in Abitibi and Newfoundland than in Montreal and Toronto.

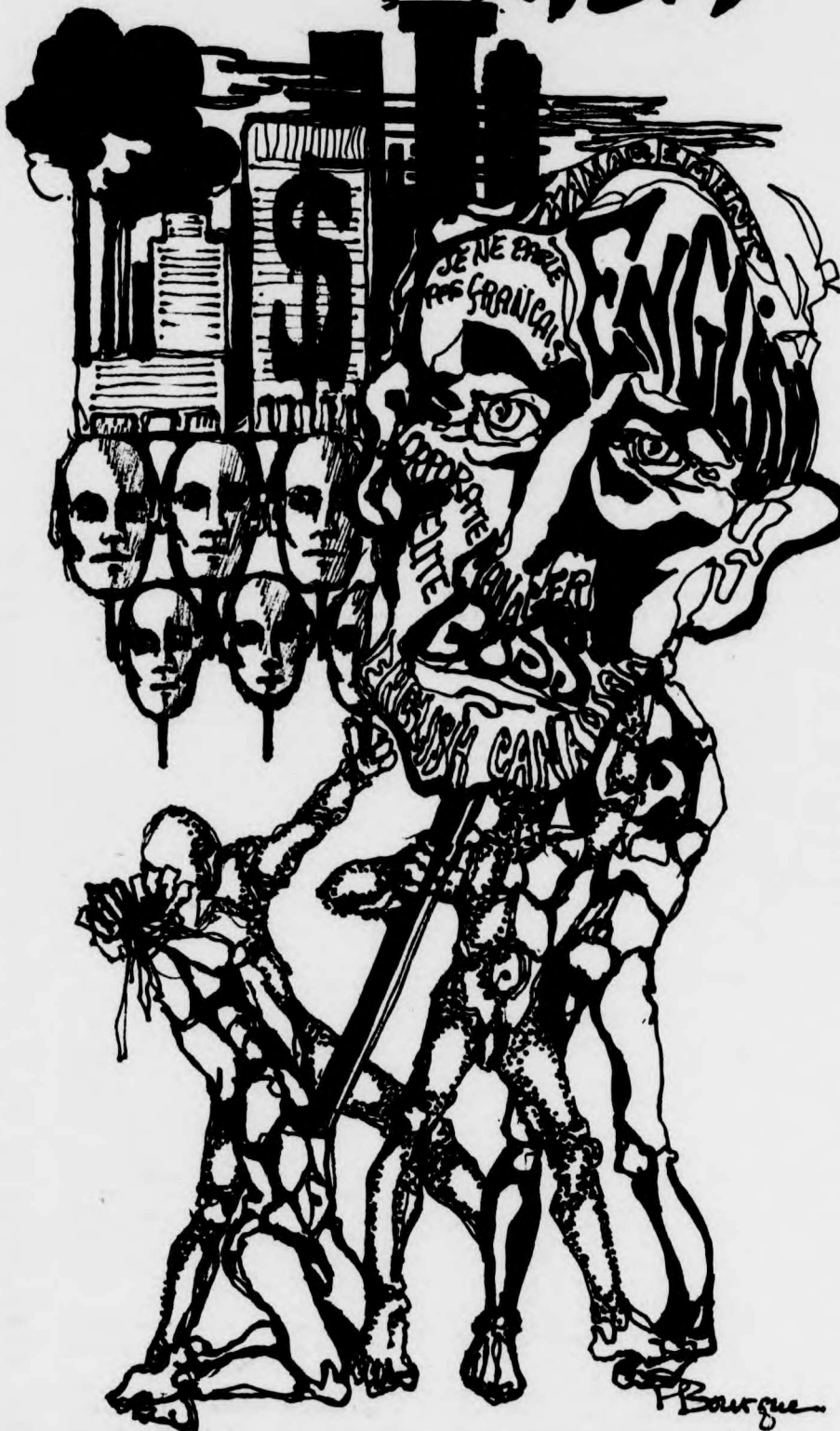
But this doesn't explain the differences in salary between ethnic groups living side by side in the same economic region.

Above and beyond regional factors, ethnic characteristics remain very, very important. Canadians of British origin have incomes 10 per cent higher than the average in every province except Quebec, where they earn 40 per cent more than the average.

In Quebec, if one arranges ethnic groups in descending order by salary, one gets the table you see on this page, where it is found that French Canadians, Italians and native Indians are the only groups which earn less than the provincial average.

These statistics refer only to the labor force. If one takes account of demographic factors in each group (women, aged, children who don't work) and calculates the per capita revenue of each ethnic group, one finds the French Canadians are even poorer.

The French Canadian



population being younger, it makes up the majority of children and young workers; its level of work is the lowest in Quebec.

Education is one of the most important factors in the determination of salary. The various ethnic groups have quite different levels of education. The French Canadians, with an average of 7.08 years of study, come just ahead of the Italians, with 6.05 years.

Jews lead with 10.05 years and the English have 9.43. The economists point out that the English in Quebec are better educated than the English in any other province except British Columbia.

If the advantages of education are analyzed, one concludes that "French Canadians derive the least from education." When a French Canadian passes from elementary school to university, he profits less,

financially, than Canadians from other groups.

Studying ethnic groups according to occupation, the report concludes: "The respective status of English Canadians and French Canadians is absolutely systematic in all provinces. If occupations are divided into 10 categories, one finds that the English Canadians are over-represented in the first (and wealthiest) four categories and under-represented in the four

lowest (and poorest).

"The French Canadians are the diametric opposite; under-represented in the first four, over-represented in the poorest categories."

Is the situation getting any better?

On the contrary. "Since 1941, while the English, Jewish and 'other' groups have been progressing strongly on the occupation scale, the Italian and French have been dropping just as dramatically.

"In the case of Italian Canadians, the reason for this disparity is unquestionably their recent immigration (new arrivals generally have the least money) but in the case of French Canadians, the drop cannot be explained away."

Beyond that, for equal work, the salaries of French-speaking people are again lower than those of the English, and the gap increases with time, so that the French Canadians appear clearly handicapped in their ability to advance in their careers.

One might have believed that bi-lingualism would be profitable at least in Quebec. According to the economists, "the answer is overwhelmingly negative. Unilingual English Canadians earn as much as bilingual English Canadians while French Canadians who speak only English (the assimilated) earn considerably more than bilingual French Canadians. And bilingual French Canadians earn considerably less than unilingual English.

In total . . . unilingual English Canadians earn \$5,502 while bilingual persons earn \$4,772. In short, it isn't the knowledge of two languages that is beneficial to the French Canadian in Quebec, but rather the knowledge of one language — English.

"In Quebec", the authors add, "as in the rest of the country, it is better to be a unilingual English Canadian than a bilingual French Canadian."

And they conclude the survey: "English Canadians have very little reason to become bilingual, even in Quebec, while for French Canadians, bilingualism is a prerequisite to income. And even if bilingual, French Canadians cannot hope to equal the salaries of unilingual English."

AVERAGE INCOMES OF SALARIED MALES IN 14 ETHNIC GROUPS, QUEBEC, 1961

	In Dollars	Index
General average	\$3469	100.
British	4940	142.4
Scandinavians	4939	142.4
Dutch	4891	140.9
Jewish	4851	139.8
Russians	4828	139.1
Germans	4254	122.6
Poles	3984	114.8
Asians	3734	107.6
Ukrainians	3733	107.6
Other Europeans	3547	102.4
Hungarians	3537	101.9
French Canadians	3185	91.8
Italians	2938	84.6
Native Indians	2112	60.8

From census calculations, Dominion Bureau of Statistics.