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Bilingualism

It is now generally acknowledged that French Canadians have gotten the short end of the Great Bargain. Nearly thirty per cent of Canada's twenty-two million citizens have French as their mother tongue. Some eighty-five per cent live in the province of Quebec, and yet even there virtually all federal government operations and private business have been conducted in English. In economic terms this means that Anglophones got the better jobs. As a rule, even in Quebec, unilingual English Canadians made more money than bilingual French Canadians in Quebec* (see footnote). The spirit in both business and government has been that for an Anglophone to learn French is a show of good spirit (or dementia, depending on the part of the country). The Francophone, however, generally must speak English to work successfully in his own federal government and until recently even to deal with it.

Even more important than money, French Canadians feel that the system has worked to deny them their culture. There have been changes—recent, experimental, and in some cases, front-office. But in spite of a French press and vigorous French broadcasting, and despite a healthy French Canadian presence in the more traditional vocations such as law and the Church, French Canadians feel culturally oppressed. As one man put it, "When I go to work, I hang up my language with my hat." To go up in one's field, a Quebecois must become so assimilated with the language and culture of success, she or

*One recent survey showed that while only fifteen per cent of Quebec employees were Anglophones, they made up thirty per cent of those earning more than \$5,000, sixty-one per cent of those earning more than \$10,000, and seventy-seven per cent of the highest bracket. Anglophones like to point out, as a justification for these figures, that in the past Church-dominated French-language education in Quebec placed little importance or prestige on commercial or technical training, with the result that a much lower proportion of French Canadians today have the education necessary for advanced careers in business or industry.

he must perforce neglect his own. It makes it no less galling to be reminded that French-speaking Canadians, the community centred in Quebec in particular, stand alone, in linguistic and cultural isolation, a tiny minority in a North American setting of 220 million that is overwhelmingly English-speaking.

In their almost four centuries on this continent, French Canadians have learned to survive and, to a degree, prosper. They see themselves as a French element in North America, grown to their present six millions from a tiny colony of 60,000 at the time of the British conquest, shaped by the totality of their experience in the shadow of the Laurentian Shield—culturally, economically, socially, and, not least, climatically.

There are many qualifications, of course, but the odds are not in the Francophone's favour. About thirty per cent of the people whose mother tongue is French have learned to speak English more or less fluently. Research in the 1960's showed that less than five per cent of those whose mother tongue is English speak French with any fluency. French Canadian children grow up learning that theirs is a second language, a tolerated culture.

[THE BEGINNINGS]

How it all began is a question you'll hear answered quite differently in French and English histories, and this article won't attempt to tackle it. It will deal mainly with the federal government's use of French within the public service.

The Treaty of Paris (1763) sealed the British military conquest of the French in Canada, but faced with unrest in the thirteen southern colonies, the British soon gave up the attempt to assimilate the French population. The Quebec Act of 1774 guaranteed the French their language and cultural rights, and French was used somewhat in government and business.

The present Canadian confederation was formed in 1867. It was not exactly a marriage between cat and canary, but it was no equal bargain, either. The British North America Act made