

LANGUAGE LUNACY PERSISTS IN PROVINCE

Description

Do you remember hearing about our Language Commissioner, Katherine d'Entremont, making a complaint to her own office about commissioner Wayne Grant, then investigating that complaint herself, and then writing a report based on that complaint? Remember how Wayne ended up fired, then re-hired to work a parking lot? Well, I hope you didn't assume that Wayne's removal was the end of that matter. It wasn't.

Her self-written report into that self-initiated complaint (released in March 2016) called on the provincial government to require that all commissioners who deal with the public be bilingual. Keep in mind that d'Entremont only has the power to recommend changes; she is not able to enforce her recommendations. At the time, Cabinet minister Donald Arseneault said bilingualism is important to the government "regardless of how services are delivered to the public" and that it would review the recommendations.

Now, two commissioners working at the Vitalité Health Network Community Mental Health Centre on Albert Street in Moncton are being removed from their jobs because they aren't bilingual. Commissioners are responsible for security services, and for greeting those who come to the building. 61-year old Doug Dickinson, from Riverview, and 67-year old Ward MacDonald both received letters from the Canadian Corps of Commissioners stating they are being "administratively removed" from their jobs effective June 3. The letter says they do "not possess the required linguistic skills" and the move is "not performance related."

Doug is a 23-year veteran of our military, and has served overseas. He's good enough to serve the country, and hence this province, but he's not good enough to greet visitors at a government facility in NB. How's that for a "Thanks for your service" move?

In a written statement to CBC News, Pieter Kramers, the chief executive officer of commissioners in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, says the decision to implement bilingual security services was prompted by its client, Vitalité.

Are you wondering what prompted Vitalité to prompt the corps to make this move? Well, Vitalité Health Network says it received notice from the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages for New Brunswick that said office intended to launch an investigation following a complaint, from a citizen, about a "deficiency in the OFFER (emphasis mine) of service in both official languages". Did you catch that? The complaint wasn't about whether or not the person got what was needed at the visit to the building. The complaint was simply that they weren't greeted in two languages. That's it, so it seems.

So, because Vitalite knows full well what the wrath of the Language Commissioner can entail in the the dreaded language 'reports', "Vitalité Health Network proceeded to evaluate the facts surrounding the matter." And, horror of horrors, it was found that, yes indeed, someone had neglected to say, "Hello, Bonjour". Or, in their words, "there indeed was a deficiency in the OFFER (emphasis mine) of services

in both official languages.” Not a lack of service. Not a lack of care. But a lack of a dual greeting, it seems.

And so two good, competent men get fired. Both men say they would take French courses if they were paid for. But that’s not an option, of course. They must all of a sudden be bilingual, it seems, even though they were adults when New Brunswick was first declared “officially bilingual”.

Meanwhile, the language commissioner has also completed an investigation into the City of Fredericton following two complaints from members of the public regarding English-only communication. One of the complaints was related to the city’s Water and Sewer Division; did a sewer worker wielding a shovel greet a passerby in English only? It could be that trivial. The other complaint related to the Fredericton Fire Department’s social media accounts (English tweets seem to be the culprit there, which seems to be a problem even though many MLAs tweet in French only). The language office said the investigation was also extended to include the Fredericton Police Force’s social media platform. Yes, she unilaterally chose to ‘extend’ her investigation. She can do that, you see.

Although d’Entremont’s report into that investigation is not being published, her office said the main “recommendation” of the report stated that Fredericton must be able to “produce and publish public information simultaneously in both official languages, including on social media platforms.”

A city spokesperson confirmed that the city had received an official complaint from the language office. That complaint is “still being processed along with the development of the city’s understanding of the issue and appropriate action,” according to the spokesperson’s statement. I am anxious to see what they will do. Likely something drastic, like Vitalite did.

You see, that’s the nature of things in NB. As we found out with Wayne Grant, the Language Commissioner can be the ‘citizen’ making the complaint. Then, she can ‘investigate’ that complaint herself. And she can ‘expand the scope’ of an investigation at her whim, whether or not she is the complainant. Then, she writes her damning reports on the ‘injustices’ she finds....and the institutions targeted scurry to obey her ‘recommendations’. Or, like Vitalite, they scurry at the mere threat of one of her investigations.

Every time the PCs and Liberals have been in power, language laws have been expanded and broadened (e.g. the closed-door reviews and hand-picked contributors in 2012), to the point that it is ludicrous. Each time they are in opposition, they pay lip service to words like ‘equality’ and ‘fairness’...but that’s as far as it goes. They do not table any motions that would really change things. They feign outrage over dual busing...until they throw their hat into the leadership ring (e.g. MacDonald).

While I like David Coon of the Green Party, he wanted language sign laws to apply to all private businesses, everywhere in NB. So that shows where he stands on the issue.

Dominic Cardy of the NDP also seems to support the language laws, based on several media articles which can be found online, and on a CBC panel insisted the problem is lack of access to education in the French language.

Lack of access is a problem. But the bigger problem is that ‘service in the language of choice’ has

been usurped by petty nonsense like being greeted in two languages. It has also been misinterpreted to mean that 'employees must be bilingual', and that access to service must be 'immediate and in-person', thereby denying the right for NB to jump feet-first into the 21st century and use -*gasp*- technology such as instant video links and language lines to help make up for any gaps in personnel linguistic ability. You know...like the rest of the 21st-century world does.

If there is any hope of restoring common sense to NB, we must elect a party and its people who are actually calling for common sense interpretation and application of what it means to offer service in the language of choice. We must elect a party that will not hold secret reviews with hand-picked contributors representing only one side of the equation. So I'll stick with the People's Alliance in 2018. They fit that bill nicely.

I am so sick and tired of the language lunacy in this province.

Are you? If so, are you willing to do something about it? I hope so!

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