

The Two Solitudes of New Brunswick (Translated using Google Translate)

Description

PUBLISHED ON APRIL 13, 2017

FREDERICTON – New Brunswick has officially been bilingual since 1969, but the reality is different on the ground. Between indifference, incomprehension and even tensions, the Atlantic province lives, at its level, the two solitudes of Canada, according to the specialist of linguistic rights, Michel Doucet.

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“In New Brunswick, we share the same territory but we do not know each other. You can see it in the media: the English-speaking media do not talk about Francophone affairs and vice versa,” says Michel Doucet, director of the International Observatory of Language Rights. “With social media, reactions come out faster and stronger, and a lot of false information circulates.”

According to a 2010 survey by Continuum research, bilingualism in the province would be supported by 82% of New Brunswickers. For the former president of the Société de l'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick (SANB), Jean-Marie Nadeau, this percentage translates even daily.

“I have more and more anglophone and francophile friends who are sensitive to the cause of bilingualism.”

The current SANB President, Kevin Arseneau, emphasizes that “the majority understands our issues much better today.”

“My father-in-law remembers that when he went to Miramichi in the 1970s, he was hiding that he was a francophone. This is no longer the case today!” – Kevin Arseneau

But the figures seem to support Mr. Doucet. The great majority of the Anglophone community, although they say they support the equality of the two languages, does not speak French. In a province of 739,900 people, 32% of whom are Francophones and 65% of Anglophones, their bilingualism rate is only 15.9%, compared with 71.4% for Francophones.

Scapegoat

This reality serves as an argument for groups that question the current bilingualism policy in New Brunswick, such as the Anglophone Rights Association of New Brunswick (ARANB), which judges that its community is not getting its fair share, Particularly in terms of access to the labor market.

“What we are asking for is an equitable distribution of government services and expenditures, as well as equitable access to employment. Bilingualism is very often required, while many of us do not speak French. In addition, the level requested is far too high,” said Rex Tracy, vice-president of the organization founded two years ago and which would bring together 2,000 people.

In her latest annual report, Katherine d'Entremont, Commissioner of Official Languages of New Brunswick, indicated that, according to the latest government data, only 41% of employees in government departments and agencies must be bilingual. It also noted that English-speaking unilingualism remains the majority in the senior civil service.

"There are many myths associated with bilingualism. People do not always understand the Official Languages Act and would like accommodations for francophones but not necessarily equal services, which is contrary to the law," she says.

Not to mention a crisis, Mr. Arseneau acknowledges tensions, linked, according to him, with the economic problems of the province. In March, Statistics Canada found unemployment at 8.4% in New Brunswick, compared with 6.7% in Canada.

"In times of economic hardship, bilingualism becomes easy prey. But many of these people are facing the same challenges as us."

According to Tracy, anger rumbles.

New Speech

But the speech changed from the 1990s when the Confederation of Regions (COR) was the official opposition to the legislature.

"Previously, some groups wanted to get rid of bilingualism on the pretext that the majority of the population in the province is anglophone ... It's crap! When the province became bilingual, the Acadians were much less well-off than the rest of the population. Today, we find it normal that Acadians have access to services in their own language. The problem is that we have gone too far!" Says Tracy.

The accession of Blaine Higgs, a former CoR activist, to the leadership of the Progressive Conservative Party of New Brunswick, according to Doucet, shows that the strategy has also changed.

"Former CoR activists understood that they had to join more traditional parties and nuance their speech to get their message across."

Political responsibility

For the majority of the speakers met by [#ONfr](#), the Liberal government, which counts many Acadians and francophones, does not play its part to ease the tensions. On several occasions, the Minister responsible for Official Languages, Donald Arseneau, and Prime Minister Brian Gallant, attacked Madame d'Entremont.

"The government abandoned it and a minority stigmatized it while it did a great job with a very small team. If the government better explained its role and its decisions, it would make a lot of difference," says SANB's current president, Arseneau,

And even though the Prime Minister recently made a few statements to celebrate bilingualism, according to Mr. Nadeau, the damage had already been done.

“When they attacked Madame d’Entremont, it was a first time too many! They are more Liberals than Acadians. The same thing happens at the municipal level, in Moncton, where the majority of the Acadian council is dithering on the bilingual display ... Paradoxically, Premier Hatfield, although unilingual English-speaking, has served us more favorably. ”

Minister Arseneault defends himself.

“Even if we do not always agree with the commissioner, we respect her independence and her opinion and we act by promoting bilingualism that brings us incredible economic benefits.”

For Doucet, the minister’s response reflects a trend almost 50 years after the first Official Languages Act of New Brunswick.

“The official languages remain taboo in the public square. The few times we talk about it, it’s mainly to boast of the economic benefits, never to highlight the social and political benefits. The parties are afraid of a few minority vocal groups, because they know that to be re-elected, they can not rely solely on the Acadian vote. ”

In his opinion, this hesitation is illustrated by the absence of an official response from the government to the annual report of the Commissioner of Official Languages, handed over in June. And even when an information session on the Official Languages Act is held in the legislature, the event is shunned by a large majority of MPs, Doucet reports.

“The government and members of Parliament have a leadership role to play, but the problem is that they do not understand the Official Languages Act itself and its obligations. How could they explain it and convince the population? ”

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Date Created

2017-04-13