

**ALLIANCE QUEBEC DENOUNCES AN ALARMIST LA PRESSE STORY.
LOUISE BEAUDOIN USES SUCH STATISTICS TO JUSTIFY TIGHTENING THE SCREWS**

Montreal, Wednesday, May 12, 1999 - La Presse did a disservice to truth as well as to linguistic peace in Quebec when it published Monday at the top of its front page an alarmist and misleading headline: "Le français ouvre moins de portes que l'anglais."

The first paragraph of the story by François Berger was also alarmist and misleading:

"La langue française ouvre beaucoup moins de portes que l'anglais à Montréal pour les immigrants admis récemment et qui cherchent un emploi, démontre une nouvelle étude qui vient confirmer la précarité du français dans la métropole québécoise."

On what was this provocative statement about the "precarity of French" in Montreal based? The second paragraph provides information about the unemployment rate among immigrants who arrived in Canada between 1991 and 1996.

"Selon les données du dernier recensement de la population, en 1996, les immigrants âgés de 15 ans et plus, arrivés au Québec depuis 1991, ont un taux de chômage de 33% quand ils ne connaissent que le français (outre leur langue d'origine), tandis que ce taux descend à 25.1% chez ceux qui ne connaissent que l'anglais."

The reporter used figures comparing the gross rates of unemployed immigrants among those who knew French only and those who knew English only. But he did not use the far more significant figures, supplied in the study he quoted, that compared people with similar levels of education. That reduced considerably the difference between unemployment levels.

In fact, among men, the unemployment rate was 29.8 per cent for recent immigrants who spoke only French and 27.0 per cent among those who spoke only English. By comparing people of similar education, you eliminated 57.1 per cent of the difference between the two unemployment rates.

What about the 2.8 percentage points remaining? We simply don't know what it is due to. Can it be explained by factors other than language? It well might be, for instance, that immigrants arriving from one country, with a different work ethic than those from another country, could have different unemployment rates. Whether they speak French or English may very well have no bearing. Or it could be that those who speak English only have more longer established communities and available job networks than those who speak French only. It could also be that the percentage of French-

speaking immigrants that are people of colour, may be greater than for their English-speaking counterparts, and thus be subject to more racial discrimination and a consequently higher unemployment rate.

But the reporter leaped to conclusions to suggest that there were more job openings for people who speak only English than there were for people who speak only French. That is a rash judgment that is not justified by the data and that was never made in the studies from which Mr. Berger derived his story.

Moreover, other information in that study gave the lie to the proposal put forward as a fact in the headline - that "French opens fewer doors than English." Mr. Berger refers to the figures, but never draws out their implication.

According to gross figures supplied by the Statistics Canada study, Canadian-born males who speak only French have an unemployment rate that is 12.2 per cent, while those who speak English only had an unemployment rate of 16.7 per cent. This suggests that the French language opens far more doors than does the English language.

The gross difference among Canadian-born females was even greater than among males. Those who spoke only French had an unemployment rate of 9.6%, compared to 15.1% for those who spoke only English.

Recently arrived immigrants are a tiny proportion of Quebec's work force. Many factors other than language and education affect their likelihood of finding a job. To leap to grand conclusions based on their somewhat different unemployment rates is simply unwarranted. Far more significant is the unemployment picture of those who are Canadian born and speak French or English. This is the bulk of the work force. There, the considerable advantage of those who speak French points weightily to the opposite conclusion from that given in the La Presse report.

If the unemployment figures tell a story, it is of the precariousness of those who do not speak French, not the precarious state of French in Montreal.

But, based on such unfounded alarms, one can expect Louise Beaudoin to redouble her efforts to restrict the use of English in Quebec. On April 24, she published a piece in *Le Devoir* with the ominous headline: "Survival of French in Montreal: A Linguistic Policy Firmer than ever. It must be recognized that the Charter of the French Language cannot by itself ensure the use of the French Language."

Citing demographic projections showing a decrease in the number of francophones on the island of Montreal - they had moved across the rivers, north and south, to the

suburbs - she evoked the supposed need to ensure the francisation of firms with 10 to 50 employees, now exempted from the coercive measures of the Charter of the French Language.

Two days later, appearing before the National Assembly's Committee on Culture, she was even more explicit: "We are going to have to intervene much more massively concerning francisation in the work place," she said. And she explained that, if things were left to Bill 101, francisation might arrive too late.

"I will try to make history, as you know, with all of you. So we are going to have to act."

This is a new threat against the English-speaking community's right to work in English. It is currently being given plausibility by misleading use of statistics such as was perpetrated this week by La Presse.