

February 20, 1997
Rt. Hon. Jean Chrétien,
Prime Minister of Canada
HOUSE OF COMMONS
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 1A6

Prime Minister:

As leaders of two agencies espousing the rights of the official language minorities in our respective provinces, we write you jointly on a matter of utmost importance to the future of our communities.

Human Resources training has been one jurisdiction among many where federal and provincial governments have evolved programs that serve the public. These programs have at times been less than perfect in their effectiveness for members of our communities.

In particular, in Quebec, there have been no efforts whatever to end the long-standing refusal by both levels of government of the reasonable demand to provide that learning the second official language by someone from the official language minority is job skill training, worthy of government-funded programs.

As your government intends shortly to sign an agreement transferring control over training programs in Manitoba and Quebec to the respective provincial governments, please allow us to express our shared concern about the change.

First, our two groups, in principle, support devolution to the provinces of responsibility for Human Resources training. However our support is contingent on the presence of detailed, specific, legal assurance of minority language services be left intact and even expanded under provincial control. The federal accord with Alberta offers little scope for optimism that our concerns are understood. It provides only that the Official Languages Act will apply with respect to the definition of "significant demand."

Nevertheless, it makes no clear reference on how services and information will be offered, what criteria will be used when evaluating need and what recourse will be available to minority-language communities if provisions of the agreement prove unsatisfactory.

The accord for New Brunswick has just barely a mention of minority language issues. That may be satisfactory in New Brunswick where the government is dedicated to

two-language services throughout the province. Our situations are not similar to that one.

It cannot be the will of your government that a generation's progress on language rights be compromised as a result of this policy of devolution. But the uncharacteristic reticence to state publicly and clearly that all language guarantees of the past will be incorporated and expressly undertaken by the governments responsible for the future programs leaves us perplexed, concerned and skeptical of the continued commitment of your government to the promotion of linguistic duality.

Our communities are well aware of the pressure for changing Confederation to meet new challenges. But French-speaking communities of Manitoba and English-speaking Quebecers will not stand by and watch our rights to use and to be served in our languages placed at odds with the federal government's desire to demonstrate Canada's flexibility.

We call on you to insist that the specific, formal guarantees of second-language services and programs be drafted by your government and negotiated into the agreements for Human Resources training devolution to Manitoba and Quebec. We ask you to confirm the principle of the importance of the two-language character of this country and its effective expression in our two provinces.

Sincerely,

(Madame) Pat Courcelle
Présidente,
Société franco-Manitobaine

Michael J. Hamelin
President
Alliance Quebec