

Brief on
Draft Law Number 143
Equity in the Civil Service

Submitted by:

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Introduction

As the Committee studying draft law 143 is aware, Alliance Quebec is an association which lobbies governments at all levels for the rights and needs of the English-speaking population of Quebec to be respected. Our organization has chapters in Montreal, West Island, East Island, South Shore, Laval, Rouyn-Noranda, Val d'Or, Saguenay Lac Saint Jean, Mauricie and the Upper and Lower Laurentians. We also have our provincial youth commission that represents young people province-wide. In all, over 83 percent of Quebec's English-speaking population resides in Alliance Quebec territory.

Alliance Quebec held our annual Convention in May 2000, electing a new president, executive committee and board of directors. One of the priorities set by the leadership of the organization for the coming year is working with all levels of government to improve the numbers of English-speaking Quebecers in the civil service and bureaucracy. Our organization strongly believes in the need for young people within the English-speaking community to remain in Quebec and contribute to Quebec society. We are prepared to undertake major efforts to convince members of our community to remain in Quebec. However, for our community to feel part of Quebec society, we want to be included in the public service in fair proportions to our percentage of the population.

For the purpose of this brief, we consider the members of the English-speaking community to be those people in Quebec who use English as their primary official language. In the 1996 census, this amounted to slightly over one million people. We do not agree that the English-speaking community should be relegated to those who speak English as their mother tongue. Many of our most prominent community leaders would not be included under such a definition. We encourage the government

to recognize that the definition of the English-speaking community has to be inclusive for the purposes of this legislation.

We truly believe that although our vision may be very different from that of the governing party on many issues, we can find common cause on the need to fairly represent the English-speaking community in positions throughout the civil service.

Our Views

In 1996, only 0.76 percent of those employed by the Quebec civil service were from the English-speaking community even though English-speakers make up about 14.25 percent of the population of Quebec.

Such a massive under-representation is not only bad for English-speakers - many of whom have lost faith in their government - but it is also unhealthy for the society as a whole as it causes tens of thousands of people to feel excluded from positions in the civil service. Most young people within the English-speaking community are relatively fluent in French and, with sufficient time to develop on-the-job vocabulary, could fill any entry-level job in the civil service. However, most of them would be reluctant to apply because of the perception that they have no chance of being hired – the feeling that the odds are stacked against them.

Now the Government of Quebec is studying a bill which would address the under-representation of women, visible minorities and aboriginals in the entire public sector, including Hydro-Québec, the Surete du Québec, hospitals, schools, municipalities and the civil service. However, in its current form, the bill does not count English-speaking people as an under-represented group. This omission must be remedied in order for the Government of Quebec to demonstrate its commitment to deal fairly with all its citizens.

True, the bilingual institutions identified under section 29.1 of the Charter of the French Language hire enough people from the English-speaking community so that the percentages of the public sector groups identified in the bill, when added together, reflect a higher percentage than the overall 0.76 percent. But when those institutions are removed, the numbers are abysmally low. Simply because all institutions are lumped together in one bill, and some are hiring English-speaking people in higher numbers, should not eliminate the need for equity programs within other institutions such as Hydro Québec or the Sureté de Québec. Indeed there is often a problem even within section 29.1 institutions. Many are hiring fewer people from the English-speaking community than might be expected. In fact, a study conducted by Alliance Quebec's West Island Chapter found that some cities in the West Island, with over 75

percent English-speaking residents, have fewer than 20 percent of their employees coming from the English-speaking community.

How things came to be this way

The historical perception of economic inequality between the English-speaking and French-speaking communities in Quebec is well-known. Until the Quiet Revolution, members of Quebec's French-speaking majority tended to earn less than members of the English-speaking community and were often kept out of higher-paying executive jobs by an establishment of English-speaking men who promoted people who looked and sounded like themselves.

In the 1960s, provincial legislation and a new modern outlook within the French-speaking community of Quebec, began the rapid process of ending inequalities. But where the legislation of the Quiet Revolution helped end old inequalities, the next generation of legislation helped create new ones. The objective of the Charter of the French Language was to use the powers of the Quebec government to foster the advancement, individual and collective, of French-speaking Quebecers. However, this objective led to the departure of hundreds of thousands of English-speaking people from Quebec and left many of those who remained with the feeling that they were not welcome in Quebec government positions or the para-public sector.

An important part of the Quiet Revolution consisted of building up the muscles of the state, by the formation of a much larger and more activist public service, by the creation of crown corporations to operate in the forestry industry, mining, steel, asbestos and, of course, most important, hydro-electricity. La Société générale de financement was created as an investment arm. The state created the single largest pool of capital in the country by channeling the pension funds of the province and various industries into the Caisse de dépôt et placement. As compared to other jurisdictions in North America the percentage of people working in the public service is higher making it even more necessary for young English-speaking people to feel that they have opportunities in this sector to convince them to remain in Quebec.

The Government of Quebec must therefore commit itself to correcting the low representation of English-speaking people in the public sector in order to ensure that the English-speaking community can continue to remain a vibrant and dynamic part of Quebec society. Keeping the youth of the English-speaking community in Quebec is not only vital for the community itself and the future of our institutions but also for the richness of Quebec society as a whole. English-speaking people can be a bridge between Quebec and the rest of Canada and the North American continent. Our tax dollars help build Quebec's roads and hospitals. Our presence here makes Quebec's culture more pluralistic and diverse.

Alliance Quebec and the Government of Quebec have an historic opportunity to join together in a common cause. We firmly believe that amending this equity legislation would be a huge step in convincing young people from the English-speaking community that they have a future in this province.

Action Plan

Until recently there was almost no effort to recruit English-speaking people into the Quebec civil service. Rarely were job postings sent to English community newspapers or job banks catering to the English-speaking community. As a result of our community making up such a tiny percentage of civil servants, the customary recruitment of friends and relatives to fill new positions only exacerbated the problem.

Even when English-speaking people applied for positions the results were poor. As can be seen in the recent report given by the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse, *Les programmes d'accès à l'égalité au Québec: Bilan et perspectives*. Décembre 1998. See table p. 46: Emplois réguliers dans la fonction publique québécoise, 1996: ANGLOPHONES: 411 SUR 53,806 = 0.76 POUR CENT.

The commission states: "Pourtant, quand on examine les pourcentages de candidatures jugées aptes parmi les dossiers présentés, principalement chez les "communautés culturelles" et les anglophones, on constate que les candidatures retenues ne constituent qu'une infime proportion des dossiers soumis (entre 4,2 et 4,9% pour les "communautés culturelles" de 1994 à 1996, et entre 2.8 et 4,9% pour les anglophones au même moment). Que se passe-t-il à cette étape: problème d'information de recrutement de candidatures, d'accréditation de diplômes, biais de sélection? Une chose est claire: l'intérêt pour les postes est nettement plus grand que l'embauche, mais on ne connaît pas les causes de la disproportion entre les deux. Ces questions mériteraient examen." We would note that the study recommended by the commission as to why so few English-speaking Quebecers are employed in the Quebec public service has never been carried out.

English-speaking youth have not been the beneficiaries of Quebec government employment programs until a major program to hire minority youths in the Quebec civil service was announced with fanfare for the summer of 1999. But even then, of the 4,218 students hired, only 217 were English-speaking, a mere 5 percent.

While we certainly thank the government for this long-overdue first-step, we must reiterate that a lot more needs to be done to end the great inequity of English-speaking people in the public service. The next logical step would have been to include

members of the English-speaking community as a target group in the current employment equity legislation.

Recommendations

Therefore, we are pleased to make the following recommendations to the Committee:

- 1. The English-speaking community should be one of the target communities in the legislation.**
- 2. Efforts should be made to recruit from the English-speaking community.** Such an effort could be done by posting positions and information in English-language newspapers, universities and employment centres targeted at English-speaking people. In addition, recruitment material should be made available in English as well as French to make English-speaking people feel that they are welcome. We obviously have no objection to requiring good knowledge of French for positions in the civil service but recruiting materials should be as welcoming as possible and publishing English versions of them is an important symbol. Moreover, we would recommend that a small number of people be hired to do recruitment from the targeted communities.
- 3. The knowledge of English as a job skill should be taken into account.** Given that at least 14.25 percent of the population would prefer to receive government services in English, it seems logical that a similar percentage of public servants in province-wide departments be hired on the basis of being able to serve those people.
- 4. The knowledge of French that applicants are required to have should not exceed the requirements of the position and the process should allow for the development of job specific vocabulary.** Often, English-speaking people are bilingual but lack specific French vocabulary relating to the work force. Applicants should receive a probationary period to master this vocabulary.
- 5. CV's written in English should be accepted for all positions.**
- 6. Interviews with English-speaking candidates should be conducted at least partially in English and, ideally, at least one member of the committee should be from the English-speaking community.** This would help to put the applicant at ease and demonstrate that the public service is open to English-speaking people.
- 7. Efforts should be made by the government to speak with recruitment and placement professionals who serve the English-speaking community to find out where they see the problems and strive to correct them.**

8. Realistic targets should be set and incentives put in place for achieving those targets in recruitment.

Conclusion

Mr. Robert Perrault, Minister of Citizen Relations, said that this new bill is very significant because it appears to be "the most determining factor for the future of Quebec society" (The Gazette, 16 June 2000). We believe very strongly that the inclusion or non-inclusion of English-speaking people in this bill will be an important message to our community.

The government has the opportunity to say yes to a Quebec public service that includes English-speaking people as an important component. Or it has the opportunity to play with numbers and try to convince Quebecers that there is no under-representation of English-speaking people in the para-public sector.

We can emphatically assert that no numbers that could be put forward would convince us, or any other English-speaking community leaders, that immediate action was unnecessary. We sincerely hope that the government listens to Alliance Quebec as well as other representatives of the English-speaking community that may appear before the committee and amends the draft law to include English-speaking Quebecers.

We have the utmost faith that in doing so the government will be perceived as correcting an injustice and will be applauded for it from most segments of Quebec society.

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