

## **Introductory Statement Made at the Press Conference on the Canada Post Office Corporation Issue**

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By William Johnson, President of Alliance Quebec

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We've often wondered why English-speaking Quebecers are so drastically under-represented in the federal public service. In May, the Commissioner of Official Languages presented his report on the year 1998. It contained disturbing facts.

Last year, "in Quebec, 96.5 per cent of new recruits were francophones," the Commissioner reported. That means that non-francophones – 18 per cent of the population – provided only 3.5 per cent of new recruits. Why?

In the Old Port of Montreal Corporation, we were told, 97.6 per cent of its 164 employees are French-speaking. That leaves 2.4 per cent for everyone else. Are there no Anglos in Montreal?

Montreal Airports has 96.4 per cent francophones among its 566 employees. The Port of Quebec Corporation has 96.5 per cent francophone employees. The Laurentian Pilotage Authority, 98.0 per cent French. The federal office responsible for economic development in Quebec: 96.6 per cent francophone.

And, my favourite example is the National Battlefields Commission. In 1997 it had 70 French-speaking employees and one single, solitary English speaker. I guess Montcalm was alone for the battle on the Plains of Abraham.

We were told there was not systematic discrimination. But our observation of Canada Post Corporation, which we carried out with the help and the documentation of Alan Greer, a postal driver, leads us to a quite opposite conclusion.

We assert that, at least in the Montreal Region, Canada Post Corporation is in flagrant, systematic violation of the Official Languages Act and has been so for years. It has discriminated against non-francophone Quebecers in hiring, in setting illegal French language requirements for most of its positions, in refusing most of them their legal right to be supervised, instructed and appraised in English, in posting illegal French unilingual signs, in failing to use fully bilingual forms, and generally failing to create a bilingual working environment as the Official Languages Act requires.

The result has been that few non-francophone employees have been hired. We have tried to get the figures on the language of employees in Quebec generally and Montreal in particular from Canada Post Corporation, but have been refused. Alan Greer, though, was told by a senior official that the employees were 98 per cent French. That was the reason given for operating in French rather than bilingually in a bilingual region.

We tried to get from Canada Post Corporation a breakdown of the language requirements for different positions at Canada Post – that is, what positions require French only, French and English, either French or English, English only. We asked how many employees were in each of these categories. Canada Post refused to tell us.

What we do know is that, for years, 100 per cent of the drivers were classified as French only required, which meant that they were deprived of the right to work in English. After a complaint and an investigation by the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, a proportion of these jobs were made reclassified either French or English, but these were mostly part-time jobs which required working on a Saturday. Canada Post promised to make all the drivers jobs either French or English by 1997, but it never kept its promise.

We reason to believe that either all or most of the jobs of letter carrier are also classified as French only. This deprives them of the right to work in English. Incidentally, when I asked locally about the language classification of letter carriers, I was referred to Gilles Froment, at 345-7295. Several times I called, only to reach his voice mail. Typically, it is in French only.

The result is that, almost without exception, the only English-speaking people who work for Canada Post in the Montreal region are those who are fluently bilingual, contrary to the Official Languages Act and its provisions for Bilingual Regions. There is an atmosphere of intimidation against demanding English rights.

The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages responded to dozens of complaints, and most of them were found to be justified. But the OCOL proved to be a paper tiger. It dealt with individual complaints, but never followed up adequately on the promises to amend. And it ignored the most important fact of all: that the Official Languages Act was being flagrantly and systematically violated by Canada Post Corporation.

Andre Ouellet, chief executive officer of CPC, must have known that the Quebec operation was systematically violating the Official Languages Act. He failed to act.

So we call on the federal government to establish a commission of enquiry to determine the precise facts of the operations of Canada Post Corporation in Quebec. An immense injustice has been perpetrated year after year on the entire English-speaking community of Quebec. We and our children have illegally been deprived of jobs to which we had a right. Our language, English, has been downgraded and marginalized as though it did not have an equal right and equal status in the postal operations in the Greater Montreal Region, in the Eastern Townships and parts of the Gaspé.

The Official Languages Act has been subverted and brought into disrepute by Canada Post. If, in Greater Montreal, where more than 500,000 English-speaking people live, a federal agency tramples on the Official Languages Act, how can the act have any credibility in other parts of the country where French-speaking Canadians are fewer in number and in proportion to the population.

It is high time for an investigation, not just of Canada Post, but of all those agencies of the federal government where non-francophones have been practically excluded.