

The (92% and 5%) Counties of NB

Description

Bilingualism does not work for everybody. One of the cornerstones of bilingualism is that the two languages French and English are equal without regard for the regional realities of New Brunswick, without acknowledgement of the practical aspects of acquiring and maintaining language.

One regional reality is that there are 15 counties in New Brunswick. Eight of those counties have a population of 92% Anglophone and less than 5% Francophone on average. Those eight counties have approximately 332,000 Anglophones in their population. That's nearly 100,000 more than the total population of Francophones in the whole province.

The reality for Anglophones in these eight counties is that their exposure to the French language is almost nil. For those that stay in Southern New Brunswick after schooling, any French they may have obtained is soon lost. There is an understandable attitude of ambivalence toward learning French in southern New Brunswick because they just don't see the need. It's not an anti-French attitude but one based on practicality. It's a big ask by a small percentage group to expect French "of equal quality" (meaning no translation devices) in every corner of the province. There are those who disrespect English speaking folks and say "just learn French" but that is a refusal to acknowledge legitimate barriers of unrealistic proficiency levels and lack of exposure to the language.

In 1969 the provincial government passed the Official Languages Act and with it created a new employment requirement, fluency in French. What they have not done is prepare all Anglophone youth to meet that requirement. So today, after 50 years, Stats Canada says that less than 16% of New Brunswickers are functionally bilingual. It should be noted that the Stats Canada data does not take into account proficiency levels and testing and so the real bilingualism rate among Anglos is much less than 16%.

So language education has been a failure for our Anglo youth and still is but let's face another truth. The reality is that French as a "second" language is more easily assimilated than when it is a "first" language, especially in such an English environment. In these 92%-5% English areas young people do not hear French in the home, hear it in the neighborhoods, or hear it in the work places. This means retention of a language that is not used in these regions will not be accomplished especially at a level of intermediate plus. The following link is essential reading for Anglophones. Read it carefully. It explains the limitations Anglos face in retaining French.

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/.../2019001/article/00014-eng.htm>

So now the truth is, we have an Anglophone community that is essentially unilingual facing a work place under the jurisdiction of the official languages act that requires more and more bilingual positions. One of those work places is the civil service. Very few Anglos from the 92-5 English counties are qualified. Who is getting those jobs?

What this is leading to is a civil service out of balance, that does not reflect the society it serves. Its becoming a civil service of the minority. There are consequences for the Anglophone community as a result. The civil service drafts laws and policies, contracts companies, hires employees, directs priorities, provides direction and information to MLAs and manages and administers government operations. What does this mean for Anglo areas of the province?

So then the question becomes; how do we obtain and maintain a reasonable balance in the civil service between the English and French communities. Francophones have always been concerned about their participation rate in the civil service. It was their concern that spurred the Royal Commission by the Hatfield government and ended with the Poitier Bastarache report advocating more ways for Francophones to be present inside the civil service.

Is it ok if Anglos have a minority roll much smaller in percentage than their number in the general population in the civil service? What percentage should the 32% Francophone community have?

There are those opposed to the Anglophone community that state that Anglophones have access to 54% of civil service jobs. What is a reasonable percentage for 68% of our population? What mechanism is in place to ensure reasonable participation for these two communities in the work force?

The issues Anglophones face with the way bilingualism is implemented are real. We're simply looking for a fair language policy that will provide service in French to our friends in the Francophone community while adjusting to the barriers facing a majority trying to accommodate a small minority in many areas of the province.

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