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A Sober Look at French-English Relations in Quebec
Les relations entre les deux langues au Québec

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Article abstract

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A Sober Look at French-English Relations in Quebec

W.H. Pugsley

The Author briefly reviews the historical developments that have led to the present cultural-linguistic situation in Quebec business. He then proceeds to a realistic description of Canadian and even international markets for more and more Quebec-based secondary-manufacturing firms, stressing the need for working bilingualism and greater mobility of French-Canadian employees. In such a context, French-Canadians would get greater opportunities, and both sides would gradually abandon prejudice in favour of equity and efficiency.

Introduction

For a Quebec audience today there could hardly be any more critical problem to consider than that of French-English relations. It is a subject that seems to invite emotion and immoderate language, when what it requires is patience and reason, and a good deal of hard work. Whoever preaches hate, with flame-flecked words, may arouse the unthinking to fury, but can do no good service in the longer run to either side. Nations, and even provinces, are built on understanding and not on dissension, built on combinations of talents and not by one side trying to suppress and supplant the other. After all, both sides were born here in Quebec, and for both it is their native land.

What has given rise to most of the argument stems from the great change that has taken place in French-Canada. It has many aspects, but I would like to consider here only two, perhaps the most important two. The first is the re-orientation of interest among French-Canadians generally towards economic and business fields. The second is the change in French-Canadian education, so that it is now turning out very

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large numbers of young people educated to more sophisticated levels and in specializations more closely related to business.

Both these groups gaze at the corporate scene here is Montreal, where the industry of the Province has concentrated, and they observe, naturally enough, that the field is rather heavily occupied by English Quebecers. I say « naturally enough », because in the beginning the land was French-occupied, and political power in the province has always been French-occupied. So what were the English who came here to do unless they went into business ? If they succeeded, that is surely better than if they had failed. As in the past, they seek only to be free to continue to earn their living, and bring up and educate their children to follow in their turn.

There has been no wish or attempt to « muscle in on » or displace the French-Canadian. The English only filled a void. To an important degree, Montreal English-run business is carried on less with Quebec customers than with the rest of the country and even abroad. In doing so it has obtained sales in these other areas that provide employment for many French-Canadians in production facilities here. Considering how little French-Canadian business has been inclined to expand its operations to a national scale, it seems clear that this effort by English-Quebec businessmen has brought to the Province, and to French-Canada, employment that probably would not otherwise exist.

The Situation Today : Nation-Wide Markets

However, it is the situation today that counts. Where is French-Canada to find employment for all this tide of young French-Canadians? It will be no solution to set up more natural resources companies, and send these young people to work in mining settlements and lumber camps. They are being educated for more advanced forms of employment, and also oriented towards urban living. Ordinary manufacturing seems unlikely to be able to absorb them; for the index of manufacturing employment for Canada as a whole was the same in 1961 as in 1951. The only area that could absorb them would be more sophisticated secondary industry, the development of which we should try to encourage.

There was an article to this effect recently in *Cité Libre,* which agreed that the real money was no longer in raw materials but in the technology that stemmed from them. Thus, you don't sell just raw

nickel, but nickel alloys determined for special needs, and one might have to sell all over the world to have sufficient sales volume for each such specialized product. So this solution brings us to having to sell not only within Quebec's boundaries but well beyond them as well. There is nothing surprising about this, when you consider that in some important lines of manufacture access to even the whole Canadian market, let alone a single provincial market, hardly suffices to bring about low enough production costs.

Administrative staff is another important possible employment area, but the size of such staff will be much restricted unless the Quebec company operates nationally. Thus we come again to the need to sell beyond the Quebec market, if the necessary growth in employment opportunities is to be obtained.

However, if the industrialization here is to be for the national market, then other considerations arise. What will be the language of internal company communication and deliberation? The operations with the rest of the country will be with English-speaking customers, and will have to be carried out by English-speaking employees trained in the ways of dealing with English-speaking customers. Business done with either of our two largest international trading partners, the United States and the United Kingdom, will normally be done in English.

If the operations outside Quebec come to be or are already the more important part of a firm's whole business, then inescapably a very large part of the company's total internal communications will be in English. I could imagine a French-owned firm using English outside Quebec, and French both inside Quebec and at the top management level, but the top people would be bilingual. English-owned firms I would expect to see using a good deal of French here and English for the rest.

The young French-Canadian will then have to know English, and accept any opportunities to move outside the Province and widen his business experience. Only then will he have a chance to reach the top in his firm, however it may be owned. How could things be otherwise? Could he be put in a top position after having had no experience in or with the larger part of the business? Great are the personal obstacles that the French-Canadian faces in this sort of situation, but they are simply going to have to be overcome.

While all this means that English is going to be far from an obsolete language among us, it is nevertheless going to present you with both a problem and a challenge. The problem is that the young French-Canadian who has, in spite of the obstacles, qualified himself by acquiring knowledge of the English side of business, and already knows the French side, is going to be a hard man to beat in the battle for promotion, if the English rival knows only the English side and none of the French side. Admittedly the English side may be much the larger, nonetheless for the top positions in the truly national firms the man who has experience with both sides is going to have an obvious advantage.

Bilingualism the Solution

The answer to this, of course, and especially for those of us on the island of Montreal, is to become reasonably bilingual. This is not going to involve ability to discourse on the subtle differences of the Rationalism of DesCartes and the Empiricism of Bacon, but it is going to call for something more than simply being able to ask for the butter in French at the lunch table. This is the challenge. Moreover, it only seems sensible to me for those English-Quebecers who intend to pursue a career in this Province to learn French so they can read the French press and understand better the French mind that is all about them. Of course, this will never be done completely, but then this also holds true for French-Canadians trying to understand the English-Canadians. However, the gap is at present far too wide, and it breeds distrust. Let's reduce it.

To insist that French be *the* language spoken here in Montreal business would, of course, be a totally different matter, and no solution at all for the young French-Canadian. The larger part of the business of the national company would still be outside the Province and conducted in English. To have any communication at all between the two parts of the firm, there would have to be translation each way at the Quebec border or else bilingual staff across the country. Would the outside-Quebec English majority of the company's personnel be willing or even able, as a practical matter, to acquire sufficient fluency in French? Would French-Canadians be willing, if the shoe were on the other foot? Would French-Canadians be prepared to go outside Quebec permanently to replace the English staff? Right away those going would lose the benefit of unilingualism, since to go outside and

replace English staff any French-Canadians would obviously have to be bilingual. Could the adult English-Quebec personnel of the firm at the head office here all be reasonably expected, in middle age, to learn a fluency in French corresponding to what they now have in English and need in order to run the business ?

How long would it be before someone got the idea of moving the firm's head office ? For with the industrial firm of today, its bricks and mortar are often its least important assets. Would not American firms, coming into the Canadian market through a Canadian subsidiary, reach the conclusion that a head office here would mean communication having to go first into French and then back into English to reach the subsidiary's Western operating departments ? How much simpler to have the head office in Ontario ! This could be an important factor, with so much of the larger industry here owned by American parent companies.

Furthermore, to have everyone bilingual across the country would mean needing in all the staff a capability not needed by any Ontario company. Employing a talent greater than is needed on the spot for the job adds expense that a competitor would not have. Cost aspects could thus also run against the head office being here.

Such a development would lead to disaster. A flight of head offices from Quebec would be a tragedy of major proportions, a tragedy for the English-speaking minority here but hardly any less so for the large numbers of young French-Canadians who will be seeking the better kind of jobs that large business can provide. The picture would be then of national companies operating probably chiefly from Toronto, with one division essentially French for Quebec and another division for the rest of Canada. The « rest of Canada » division would be the larger section, and so from it the heads of the company would probably come. The French-Canadian, working in Quebec for the Quebec division, would be walled off, as it were, from broader experience and the way to the top.

Moreover, it would mean the departure of many of the industrial minds whose entrepreneurial decisions create jobs, and these jobs would go with them. Head office staffs would move. For a national firm, such staff could amount to 25% of the total employment roll. Admittedly government here has created jobs, as with the Quebec Hydro and

various subsidiaries of the General Investment Corporation. French-Canadians have certainly shown they can run these entities, but the market served, after all, is essentially a captive one, within the Province. While great pride in this achievement is certainly justified, the fact remains that it takes a great deal of capital just to support the employment of one man, especially the more highly trained man, and there will be many thousands of such men coming from the universities. Probably even the Provincial Government would be the first to admit that only with the full assistance of business as well, free to give its thoughts to increasing sales and not diverted into cautious sterility by political worries, can we hope to achieve the additional amount and kind of employment we need.

Now this is not a plea for the good old status quo, so that we can all go back to sleep. Not at all. I think French-Canadians are quite right to expect to be sold to in their language, just as English-Canadians west of the Ottawa River expect to be sold to in English. However, an English-Canadian who has learned to speak French should be just as acceptable in selling to the Quebec Market, in the same way that a French-Canadian who has learned to speak English should be acceptable anywhere in English Canada.

No Prejudice Allowed

There could reasonably be some relationship between the share of sales made in Quebec and the numbers of French-Canadians employed. This has no sanction in economic theory, but it may have in other theory. This is not to say for one minute that there should or can be any other criterion for choosing employees than ability and qualification for the job. Some may take this as a way out, but it is not intended as such. If it is intolerable for a French-Canadian to see an English-Canadian promoted just because he is an English-Canadian, it is no less intolerable for an English-Canadian to see a French-Canadian promoted just because he is a French-Canadian. It would be hard to think of a quicker way to destroy an organization. There has to be another standard, and one that can be respected by both. There is only one, and this is ability.

There is sometimes said to be prejudice in appointments, in that an English-oriented management will probably favour an English-Canadian candidate. May be, but in French-Canadian firms things

will doubtless work the other way round, and even in the English-oriented firms this preference will only operate when the abilities of the two men are deemed equal. If the French-Canadian is better qualified, even the English firm cannot long afford to accept the second best, or it will become inefficient. There is plenty of evidence too of lots of intelligent, well-educated young French-Canadians coming along now, and this sort of situation should not be a noticeable problem to them.

All of this, of course, is merely a discussion of the ground rules. A much more dynamic lift will be necessary to bring about the sort of expansion that can have a real chance of absorbing enough of the coming crop of young French-Canadians, and young English-Quebecers too, of course, to forestall any bitterness developing. The English community here is a sort of westward-facing island in a French-Canadian sea, but it has some important capabilities. It has capital, and as Somerset Maugham once said, money is the sixth sense, without which you can't make much use of the other five. English-Quebec also has an exceptional knowledge of how to use capital for economic purposes, and how to operate business, especially big business, in the English part of Canada. On the French side, industry has tended in the past to be of rather small units — there are exceptions, of course — and in particular to concentrate on the Quebec market alone.

A New Opportunity

In this peculiar situation there seems to me to be unusual opportunity of an exciting sort. In the first place, why do not more French-Canadian businesses « go national » ? The larger market should offer new economies in costs and expenses that would assist in better penetration even of present markets here. Who is to finance this ? Who is to provide the « know-how » for westward expansion ? Why not the English-Quebecers ? This is a logical way for them to integrate themselves better into the life stream of their province.

Some of the Difficulties Involved

There are difficulties involved, however. In the first place, the French-Canadian form of organization tends towards the « le patron » management, where a great deal rests on and remains in the hands of the one top man. This, as you all know, puts an effective ceiling on the degree to which the firm can expand. However, French-Canada is

giving much more attention nowadays to principles of business administration.

Another difficulty is that some may feel French-Canada often tends to regard industrial jobs in about the same light as political ones, that is, something to be obtained by pressure and held in the same manner. Thus we hear about « demanding good management jobs ». Now, management is not composed of men fighting each other. It is not a gathering of triumphant gladiators. It has to be a team. This means there has to be some inner harmony. No one would expect to be able to make demands of the sort just mentioned on French-Canadian businesses. How could they be made on English-Canadian businesses, unless the businesses are to fold as a result ?

Chasing out the English might be emotionally satisfying, but it could be expected to have about the same results as the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV. This was an act that removed the Huguenot business community from France, and undermined the whole economy. The fact is, light pressure by French Canada has resulted already in very significant penetration of English-Canadian business by French-Canadians Massive pressure would probably trigger important organizational re-arrangements, and place in jeopardy the gains French Canada has made. As Napoleon III said, even if he did not follow his own advice, « il ne faut rien brusquer » — « don't upset things ».

There have been irritating pinpricks from the French side that greatly annoy the English Quebecers. One could easily answer the numerous assertions voiced in disparagement of the English community in Montreal. Petty and spiteful though these statements are, they are nevertheless important. Politicians say what they know constituents are thinking. How can people come to have such mean, distorted thoughts ? There is a simple explanation : they do not know us, and we do not know them. It is very easy to build up a dislike for someone you have never met or known. When you were a child, did it never happen that you thought some elderly old woman was a hateful old witch, only to learn later, to your great embarrassment, that she was in fact kindness itself ? Have you never gone to meet someone for business or social reasons, expecting to find an ogre and ending up instead by being charmed ? It happens all the time.

Our contacts with French-Canada are so few really that it is not surprising if some out-dated stereotype is the image they have of us.

The gulf between « The Two Solitudes » has not narrowed in the 20 years since Hugh MacLennan wrote about them. This is surely reason enough in itself for us to set to work in the manner I have suggested. Nothing could do as much to bring mutual respect, one for the other, as through working together in business, and there is nothing we need more than this mutual respect. Respect, after all, is not something that can be commanded. Respect can only be earned.

Lack of contact makes possible, and perhaps even encourages, a disparaging view of other people. When some French-Canadian starts complaining to his friends about how awful the English Quebecers are, it is going to make a big difference whether his friends reply with the equivalent of « Ain't that the truth », or say instead, « Well, I don't know about that, I know some pretty decent ones ». The same applies to English-Quebecers when they discuss French-Canadians.

One of the big arguments in favour of direct management-labour confrontation has always been that if people come together face to face around a table their pre-determined positions begin to appear a bit less tenable. The same could be true on the larger scale. The needs of both sides here complement each other: English-Canadian capital and « know-how » needs profitable application, French-Canada wants much more employment, and the fact is that no one can make real money in industry without creating a lot of jobs.

Conclusion

From greater collaboration would follow much reduced tensions here between the two groups. The present situation is less as a problem than an enormous opportunity. If *both* sides would put aside their prejudices, then each might have an honest chance to learn the real character of the other. The result would be both a much better integration of French-Canada into the overall national industrial picture, and a great flowering of economic endeavour in Quebec. Each of these is essential if we are to create a Quebec that is an equal economic partner with the rest of the country.

This article is a reproduction of a speech Mr. Pugsley gave on February the 8th 1966 to the St. George Kiwanis, at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel in Montreal.

LES RELATIONS ENTRE LES DEUX LANGUES AU QUÉBEC

INTRODUCTION

Le problème des relations entre les deux langues est complexe et multi-dimensionnel. Je n'étudierai cependant que les deux plus importants aspects de la question : après quelques commentaires sur la tendance des Canadiens français à s'intéresser de plus en plus au domaine de l'économique et des affaires, je porterai mon attention sur les changements récents dans le système éducationnel québécois.

LES MARCHÉS MONDIAUX

Où le Canada français trouvera-t-il de l'emploi pour tous ses jeunes ?

Il semble que le secteur secondaire pourrait devenir, si on le développait, l'endroit par excellence.

Cité Libre notait récemment que l'avenir n'appartenait pas au domaine des matières premières, mais à celui de la technologie qu'elles permettent. Il est évident qu'avec de tels processus de fabrication, les marchés locaux ne sont pas assez grands pour épuiser l'offre. Les firmes se voient alors obligées d'étendre leur action sur des marchés mondiaux.

Les jeunes pourront aussi trouver de l'emploi dans les fonctions administratives qui risquent de ne pas se développer si les firmes québécoises n'étendent pas leurs marchés. Etendre les marchés devient donc une nécessité pour l'augmentation de l'emploi.

Mais alors quelle sera la langue utilisée dans les communications internes des compagnies ? Inévitablement, elles seront anglaises vu le grand nombre de personnes utilisant cette langue en dehors du Québec. Le jeune Canadien français devra connaître l'anglais pour monter dans la hiérarchie. La langue anglaise apparaît donc comme étant à la fois un problème et un défi pour les Québécois.

LA SOLUTION : LE BILINGUISME ?

La solution à ce problème épineux semble être le bilinguisme. Cela est aussi vrai pour les Québecois anglais qui désirent poursuivre leur carrière dans la belle province. Ils devront être capables de lire le français et de comprendre l'esprit des Québecois.

L'unilinguisme français sur l'Ile de Montréal n'apporterait aucune solution aux problèmes du jeune Québécois. Les grandes firmes sont pan-canadiennes et l'anglais la langue d'usage pour les communications internes. Il est impensable d'exiger que tous les anglais, autant au Québec que dans le reste du Canada, soient bilingues.

En plus, il reste qu'il serait loin d'être avantageux pour une firme d'être obligée de créer des services bilingues alors que certains de ses concurrents opérant à l'extérieur du Québec éviteront une telle dépense. L'impact sur les coûts d'opération serait trop grand et entraînerait la fermeture sinon l'exode des firmes et de leurs quartiers généraux québécois vers le reste du Canada.

SANS PRÉJUGÉ

Il est souvent répété que les candidats de langue anglaise sont plus favorisés à l'intérieur des organisations actuelles simplement parce qu'ils sont de langue anglaise. Ceci peut être vrai pour une firme canadienne-anglaise. Ne retrouve-t-on pas le même phénomène dans les compagnies proprement québécoises. L'égalité de traitement dépend de l'égalité de compétence et ce il ne faut pas l'oublier.

La solution semble donc être que les firmes canadiennes-françaises étendent leurs marchés au reste du Canada. La participation des Québécois anglais sera sûrement utile sinon nécessaire à une telle expansion.

QUELQUES DIFFICULTÉS

1.—L'organisation canadienne-française tend à remettre toute l'autorité dans les mains d'un seul homme, le patron.

2.—Les Canadiens français donnent l'impression qu'ils considèrent les emplois industriels comme ceux obtenus par la politique. Le patronage y devient une façon d'opérer et est loin de contribuer à l'existence du travail d'équipe chez les dirigeants.

On ne se connaît pas les uns les autres et c'est là la source de tout le problème constitutionnel au Canada. Laissons donc tomber nos préjugés.

CONCLUSION

Une collaboration plus grande contribuerait à réduire les cadres et les tensions entre les deux groupes. Il en résulterait une meilleure intégration du Canada français dans l'ensemble de l'industrie nationale et un accroissement de l'effort économique au Québec. Ceci est essentiel si on veut faire du Québec un partenaire économique égal au reste du pays.

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