



## The inconvenient truth: Quebec is a bilingual society

OPINION

« French and English speaking people have collaborated for a very long time to build the distinct success story called Quebec...»



There, I wrote it. What no elected politician will ever publicly express to avoid the risk of losing the public office that pays the significant remuneration, expense allowance and generous pension entitlements that 95 percent of Quebeckers do not earn. Few politicians speak truth to power in Quebec when the topic is language. That needs to change.

French has been the official language of Quebec since 1974 when the Liberal government led by Premier Robert Bourassa adopted The Official Language Act (Bill 22). In 1977, the Parti Québécois government led by Premier René Lévesque re-enacted the law as the Charter of the French Language (Bill 101).

Despite the unofficial status of the English language over the last 50 years, the English speaking presence in and contribution to the essence of Quebec society has endured. The de facto reality of the English-speaking community cannot be erased by government fiat. There is a kinder, gentler Quebec that does not align with the CAQ societal vision expressed in Bill 96. That asks why government engages in divisive language policies when we all get along. In Quebec's free society, languages do not clash and compete. They blend and flourish. Both the French and English language have public currency and garner respect.

The French language commands predominance in Quebec's public space. But the English language remains steadfast. A simple consideration of our history explains the continued endurance of the English language. Quebec has never been a monolithic, unilingual French-speaking society. Ever. Well into the 19th century, Montreal was a predominantly English speaking city.

Which explains downtown Montreal's street names like: Atwater, Mackay, Bishop, Crescent, Drummond, Stanley, Peel, McTavish, Mansfield, McGill College, Union, Aylmer, City Councillors. Until the 1970s, Montreal was the commercial hub of Canada. The city with Canada's largest population of that era.

French and English-speaking people have collaborated for a very long time to build the distinct success story called Quebec, because we do not fear each other's languages, we embrace them. A shared history of accomplishment that the nationalist CAQ and the separatist PQ and QS prefer to ignore rather than celebrate. A bilingual society is not a society where everyone is compelled to speak both languages. Nor is it a society where two unilingual language groups live separate and compartmentalized lives.



## The inconvenient truth: Quebec is a bilingual society... Continued

OPINION

People intermingle and are free to become bilingual or not. However, an anglophone who does not learn French will face bleak employment prospects in Quebec.

In a debate held prior to the 2014 Quebec general election, Liberal leader Philippe Couillard, a neurosurgeon whose career took him to Saudi Arabia, stated the obvious in an exchange with then PQ Premier Pauline Marois: bilingualism does not threaten the French language and francophone parents want their children to learn English because mastering this language empowers them. Philippe Couillard won that election.

Céline Dion and Cirque du Soleil are the most successful acts that ever performed in Las Vegas, the entertainment capital of the world.

The journeys of Céline Dion and Guy Laliberté's Cirque du Soleil to international stardom demanded English language proficiency.

A command of English was surely important to Premier Legault when he pursued his lucrative career in the airline industry.

The Québécois authenticity of these three individuals was not compromised by their ability to speak English. Their experience is hardly unique.

The privileged ranks of Québec Inc. swell with bilingual francophones, many having earned degrees from American Ivy League business schools.

Bilingualism has existed in Quebec for centuries and has not imperilled the French language.

Today, French is spoken by some 8 million francophones, a demographic that is becoming more ethnically and racially diverse, as well as the vast majority of approximately 1 million anglophones.

Wealth creating industries such as information technology, artificial intelligence, gaming, aerospace, pharma, and any business targeting global markets require the ability to marshal the English language to achieve the success that will augment the future prosperity of Quebec for everyone.

**Bilingualism is here to stay.**

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