

History of Bilingualism in Canada

1867

Section 133 of the *British North America Act* (now the *Constitution Act*) permits the use of either English or French in the debates of Parliament as well as in the proceedings before the federal courts. This section also provides that both languages must be used in the records and journals of Parliament, and that its laws must be enacted and published in both languages.

1927

Postage stamps become bilingual.

1934

The federal Translation Bureau is established by an Act of Parliament.

1936

Bank notes become bilingual.

1959

Simultaneous interpretation of the debates in both languages begins in the House of Commons.

1963 -1970

The Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism is established and produces its reports.

1969

- Following the work of the Commission, the first *Official Languages Act* is adopted by Parliament. This *Act* recognized English and French as the official languages of all federal courts. It grants equality of status of French and English not only in the Parliament or before courts, but also throughout the federal administration. The *Act* states that the public has the right to receive services from federal institutions in certain locations and to appear before *federal courts and tribunals* in the official language of their choice.
- New Brunswick enacts its first *Official Languages Act*, making it Canada's first, and only, officially bilingual province.

1970

- Creation of the official languages in education programs.
- The Commissioner of Official Languages whose mission is "to take all measures to achieve the three main objectives of the *Official Languages Act*" is established.

1973

A parliamentary resolution is adopted, dealing with the language of work and the participation of members of the English- and French-speaking communities in the federal public service.

1974

The *Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act* comes into force, along with regulations respecting bilingual labelling of consumer products.

1978

First Court Challenges Program - Official Languages.

1982

The *Constitution Act*, 1982, including the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, is proclaimed, containing further constitutional guarantees respecting the status and use of the official languages of Canada in federal institutions. In addition, under Section 23 of the Charter, the provinces and territories must offer primary and secondary schooling to their official-language minorities in their mother tongue, where the numbers justify (English in Quebec, French elsewhere). In 1990, the Supreme Court of Canada also established that this same Section would give official-language minorities the right to manage their own schools.

1988

The new Official Languages Act is adopted by Parliament. It repeats and qualifies the obligations under the 1982 Charter regarding the use of the two official languages in the provision of government services and throughout government institutions. Its three main objectives are:

- ensure respect for English and French as the official languages of Canada and ensure equality of status and equal rights and privileges as to their use in all federal institutions;
- enhancing the vitality of the English and French linguistic minority communities in Canada and supporting and assisting their development; and
- fostering the full recognition and use of both English and French in Canadian society.

1990

Mahé Case: the Supreme Court rules that official-language minorities have the constitutional right to participate actively, in all provinces, in the governance and control of their children's education and the educational institutions their children attend.

1992

The first phase begins of the coming into force of the Official Languages Regulations.

1994

Congrès mondial acadien: Prime Minister Chrétien announced the adoption of "an overall policy on the participation of federal institutions in community development" that requires federal institutions to produce action plans under Part VII of the Official Languages Act. Set up of the Court Challenges Program of Canada.

1997

Memorandum of Understanding between Canadian Heritage and the Treasury Board Secretariat on making departments accountable with regard to official-language minority communities.

1998

National Symposium on Canada's Official Languages.

1999

The Interdepartmental Partnership for Official-Language Communities is established to stimulate and consolidate links between minority official-language communities and federal departments and agencies.

2002

The New Brunswick government introduces a bill to update and modernize their Official Languages Act. The bill aims to fulfill obligations set out in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and to make improvements to the original bill of 1969. Provisions in the bill include fair and reasonable thresholds for municipalities to comply with requirements to translate municipal bylaws; the appointment of a Commissioner of Official Languages; access to health services within the New Brunswick Health Network in the language of choice, and a further review of the Official Languages Act every 10 years.

2003

The Federal Government announces its Action Plan for Official Languages (2003/04 - 2007/08) which aims to provide a "new momentum for Canada's linguistic duality," through increased inter-departmental co-ordination, and new investments in education, community development and the public service.

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