
Report

Discussion Forum for
representatives of young
Anglophones of Quebec

Propos

September 2003

Conseil permanent de la jeunesse

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Organizing Committee of the Discussion Forum

Patrick Lebel, President
Wojtek Baraniak

Synthesis and Compiling

Wojtek Baraniak

Production

Julie Pelletier

Correction

Versacom inc.

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The Conseil, besides the support of its own staff and members, also had the help of several volunteers who invested time and energy in the organization of the Forum. They demonstrated that they believed in the validity of this exercise of dialogue and consultation.

To all, many thanks.

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Introduction

The *Conseil permanent de la jeunesse* (CPJ) organized a discussion forum for representatives of the young Anglophone community of Quebec. The purpose of this exercise was to obtain a better understanding of the current situation of young Anglophones in Quebec. This report is an outline of some of the views expressed during that forum.

Methodology

Numerous organizations and individuals from the Anglophone community were invited to a discussion forum which was held May 26th, 2002 at McGill University in Montreal, Quebec. The CPJ tried to involve a representative group of individuals, with emphasis on regional and ethnic representation. Participants in the forum were not paid.

The meeting began with opening remarks by Sharon McCully, author, journalist, and current editor of the *Sherbrooke Record*, on the current state of young Anglophones in the Province of Quebec. The second half of the meeting was left for participants to discuss the following predetermined items on the agenda: the Quebec social system, the workforce, political involvement, the needs of various cultural communities, and the role of the CPJ in addressing issues facing young Anglophones. Participants were free to speak to these issues as individuals or as representatives of their organizations.

A neutral third party moderated the discussion and prepared this report which is a synthesis of the views and opinions expressed by the participants. The contents of this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the CPJ. Furthermore, the views expressed in this report do not necessarily represent the views of all of the participants.

The state of the situation

Excerpts of a presentation by Sharon McCully, author, journalist, and editor of the Sherbrooke Record.

Ms. McCully began by stating that as a mother of five university graduates, she may have a different perspective on the current state of affairs. For example, the term ‘student debt’ means something entirely different to her.

When her children were very young, the concern among parents was that young Quebecers would leave the province once they finished high school and not return. Ms. McCully reported that there is good news on this front—the pages of her newspaper are filled with stories of young Quebecers who are coming home.

More and more, young Anglophones who left the province after completing their education have gained some working experience and decided to return to Quebec. They are returning to their communities and making a place for themselves in a variety of ways.

More importantly, their children are restocking the schools, and they are once again becoming caregivers for the elderly. However, the exodus of young people from the province over the past two decades has had a profound impact on our community.

Twenty years ago, young Quebecers were excluded from the decision-making process and, similarly, many are frustrated today by the inability to have their ideas heard.

Ms. McCully’s generation predicted that the political uncertainty of the day would drive bright, bilingual young Anglos out of the province. They predicted that the move to centralize services in large urban centres would spell the demise of rural communities and create congestion in the cities. The migration of youths to urban centres would lead to housing and service delivery problems and leave behind an even more fragile institutional network and an elderly population. Ms. McCully believes that this has indeed been the result.

Two decades ago, a small group of young Anglophone Quebecers in the Gaspé started a group called “Rural Dignity” to stop the shutting down and transfer of

services to larger centres. They began by protesting the closing of rural post offices, and the rationalization of health care. They complained and circulated petitions when trains stopped running, when the small airports in the region closed and when the industries that relied on these carriers to get their goods to market eventually closed. As anticipated, the effect was that hundreds of young people left the region in search of work.

This resulted in fewer young families in the community to fill classrooms, fewer caregivers to provide support for the sick and elderly, and fewer volunteers to lead community organizations. Those with marketable skills left the regions, leaving behind a disadvantaged population requiring greater social assistance.

Today, governments have recognized that the policy of reducing services in rural regions was a political, economic and social mistake. Consequently, they are now pouring millions of dollars into rural revitalization programs designed to attract people to the rural regions of the province.

At a recent conference on rural development held in the eastern townships to discuss ways of attracting more people to rural areas, the representative of a youth group addressed the conference. The representative insisted that some mechanism be created to involve youths in the discussions because they are, in fact, the people most likely to settle in rural communities, buy homes, start their families and stimulate the economy. A reporter covering the conference was distressed that the youth's comments failed to gain any response from the conference organizers, made up largely of leaders of government and organizations.

The government did not listen to young people in the past, and does not always listen to young people now. There is a saying that should be immediately struck from the language—that “youths are the future.” They are more than that. They are the present. By their very nature, young people are agents of change and must be involved in formulating policy and making decisions that affect things now, not 20 years from now.

When Ms. McCully enrolled her children in a French-language elementary school 25 years ago, people remarked that it would help them get a job later on. Her objective then was not to secure their future but to enhance their lives at the moment. She wanted them to be able to speak to the youngster next to them on the hockey bench and not feel like an outsider. In other words, she and her

husband wanted their children to be able to participate fully in the community. These decisions and these battles changed things.

Staying in Quebec, seeing that her children learned the language of the majority, fighting to protect the English-language school system, to win legislative guarantees for English-language health and social services, and understanding that there was an historic imbalance in Quebec that needed to be corrected are all examples of decisions that Ms. McCully faced and made. The decisions of today's young activists will determine where Anglophones will be a generation from now.

Ms. McCully believes that some progress has been made on the issues facing the youth of today. She noted the commitments of the Quebec government at the Youth Summit, and the mechanism by which the government involved youth in its decision-making. She believes that young people must be involved in identifying issues that are relevant to them. In addition, young people must be involved in developing strategies that are youth-focused.

However, there are still many problems to overcome.

❖ **The financial aid system**

Student debt is a problem for all Canadian students. With the average student debt rising to \$12,000 in Quebec, it is a mounting problem faced by all young people. The methods for administering and repaying student loans only compound the problem. Many former students have their own experiences with banks accessing their accounts to claim payment, or with errors and delays in processing their applications.

There are also limitations on access for Quebec students who decide to attend university outside Quebec. This is particularly difficult for young Anglophones who have many more opportunities for education in other provinces. With this policy, the government has placed a higher priority on ensuring the financial stability of Quebec universities than on educating young Quebecers.

❖ **Poverty and health issues**

Youth poverty is a rising problem in Canada and Quebec. Linguistic barriers to social services must be eliminated in order to create a level playing field. Access to services for marginalized groups and for people who are geographically far from mainstream services must be improved.

Ms. McCully believes that the government has a role to play in solving these and other problems.

One of the values that Quebecers and Canadians share is the ability to live together in a diverse, multi-cultural society. Many communities and individuals have grown and developed through sharing, compromise and respect for one another.

Government has a role in influencing our actions. However, legislation alone cannot change policy—attitudes must change at the grassroots level. For example, the level of service provided to English speaking clients at designated hospitals can depend significantly on the attitude of those implementing the law. English clients at some hospitals appear to have to beg, plead and complain to get the services they are guaranteed by law.

The struggle for equality, respect and tolerance is best carried on little by little at the individual level. Changes of attitude begin with individual actions. This means becoming educated about other races and cultures. It means not using stereotyped expressions in speech and writing. In other words, it means being good citizens of the world.

In conclusion, Ms. McCully stated that individual commitment combined with meaningful participation by young people in the decision-making process can change things for the better.

The very fact that this forum was organized is an encouraging sign.

SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION

Topic 1: The Quebec social system for young Anglophones

The English-language education system

There was a general feeling that the English school system is failing young Anglophones. The main criticism was that Anglophones are not receiving the skills needed to be full and successful participants in Quebec society. Specifically, the system is not producing functionally bilingual students (written and spoken). This led many people to remark that French students are much better prepared to enter the workforce in Quebec. The fact that the school system does not promote exchanges between English and French schools was also a cause for concern as it may further alienate Anglophones.

The curriculum and adequate funding of the English school system are also topics that need to be addressed. Some delegates complained that textbooks and other in-class resources are of low quality. These problems can be traced to a lack of funding for the English education system in general. To overcome financial shortfalls, some schools apply to charity organizations for necessities such as textbooks.

In rural areas this problem is even more severe. First, there are few English CEGEPs in the regions, thus requiring teenagers to leave home at an early age and live on their own. Financing this is difficult for many families. As a result, many teenagers do not have the same opportunity for post secondary education.

The existing regional high schools and CEGEPs have difficulties attracting students. Many potential students do not attend because of a limited choice of programs. This is a vicious circle because many programs are based on enrolment.

Recommendations:

- ❖ On a positive note, a delegate observed that the Anglophone community in Quebec is the most bilingual community in Canada, second only to the Acadians. However, there is still no province-wide support for bilingualism. That said, successfully implementing any of the following

recommendations will have to be accompanied by a shift in the current view on bilingualism within the political culture.

- ❖ The common view was that a separate school system should be retained, as the English school system is one of the only remaining areas of the public sector where Anglophones retain a certain degree of control and responsibility.

However, the government should create programs where students from English schools exchange with students from French schools. For example, an English high school student might take courses in a French school for a semester. Initiatives such as this could be formulated for all levels of schooling. The goal of such a program would be to encourage both “linguistic immersion” and “cultural immersion” for all Quebecers. It was noted that such programs would also benefit French-speaking students.

- ❖ Delegates also stressed the need for Anglophone representation in the Ministry of Education in order to properly meet the needs of the education system.
- ❖ Funding to Anglophone schools should be improved. However, non-traditional methods of funding should also be explored, including the possibility of establishing school endowments.
- ❖ The funding formula for school boards in rural areas should be change and based on need rather than only enrolment. This would improve access to educational materials, facilities, and programs.
- ❖ E-learning programs could also be useful at the CEGEP level.

The social system in general

Most delegates identified the availability of English-language services as their top concern. The lack of access to English services is seen in many areas, from a scarcity of programs designed to reduce poverty among black youth to the complete absence of English-language services in rural areas for children with special needs. Delegates saw government as failing in its role.

Topic 2: Entering the workforce as a young Anglophone

Employment services

It was noted that, as a group, Anglophones are particularly mobile. Unfortunately, Bill 101 had a detrimental effect on movement both inside and into the province of Quebec. With the effect of linguistic tension slowly subsiding, there has been an intense focus on employment for Anglophones in order to make Quebec more attractive.

Jobs convince young Anglophones to stay. Organizations such as Youth Employment Services were founded to help Anglophones find employment. The organization has grown and now helps hundreds of youths every year. The existing provincial network of youth employment services (known as “Carrefour Jeunesse-Emploie”), however, does not meet Anglophone needs. For example, in most instances it does not offer service in English.

The civil service

Less than 1% of the Quebec civil service is English-speaking. This situation has continued for over a decade. However, it was noted that Anglophones exclude themselves from the civil service by not applying. This is possibly a response to a system in which the bureaucratic culture is perceived as excluding Anglophones.

There are two great challenges to face. First, Anglophone associations, community groups, and leaders must encourage individuals to apply. Second, the political leadership should set jobs aside for Anglophones and actively encourage Anglophones to apply. In other words, there should be affirmative action for Anglophones. Premier Bouchard’s commitment to reserve 25% of all new civil service recruitment for Anglophones was unsuccessful.

It was noted that flaws in the education system are directly related to a non-representative civil service. For instance, in competitions for civil service jobs, the language entry test in French is the same for Anglophones as for Francophones. However, a French language certificate obtained in an English high school does

not allow an English graduate to compete on an equal footing with a graduate from the French system.

One delegate related anecdotes suggesting that there is systemic discrimination inside the civil service. So even if Anglophones are hired by the civil service, they still face internal barriers and obstacles.

Professional recognition

Language requirements for professional licenses were also identified as difficult barriers that cause many Anglophone graduates with professional degrees to leave the province in favour of the United States or Ontario. The situation may have other adverse effects beyond losing skilled professionals. For example, as law and medicine graduates leave the province, the availability of English-language service in these professions may be left vulnerable.

Conversely, few incentives exist for graduates to move into Quebec. It is difficult to obtain professional recognition because of different standards. In fact, some Canadian post-secondary degrees are not accepted in Quebec.

Recommendations

- ❖ The government must be convinced that there are advantages to a representative civil service. The government should also try to mirror the various cultural groups that make up the Anglophone population.
- ❖ A representative civil service can be accomplished by the government regulating hiring targets. Furthermore, the government should appoint a specific individual within the Treasury Board responsible for implementing and achieving this goal.
- ❖ The government should establish a minority (both cultural and linguistic) employment strategy. The goal of this strategy would be to make more existing services available to all Quebecers. For example, “Carrefour Jeunesse Emploie” should provide services in English. Furthermore, these services should be made more familiar to all Quebecers. The name “Carrefour Jeunesse Emploie” is not understood by Anglophones who do not speak French.

- ❖ Current language programs should focus on spoken language skills instead of writing.
- ❖ Organizations such as Youth Employment Services have been effective; however, they cannot meet current demands. The government should also increase support for such organizations.

Topic 3: Political involvement for Anglophones

Decision-making bodies

The common view was that the electoral system does not make representativeness easier because the Anglophone population is geographically scattered. As a result, Anglophones are not represented on any governmental decision-making bodies. For example, Quebec Anglophones are rarely nominated to cabinet (either federal or provincial governments). Simply put, Anglophones are alienated. This has the indirect effect of discouraging young Anglophones from political involvement because they have few community leaders as models.

Few incidents have empowered Anglophones. This is because there is an inherent scepticism towards the Quebec government. History has heavily influenced this situation; for example, incidents of manipulating political ridings to the disadvantage of Anglophones only serve to strengthen this scepticism.

It was also noted that the sovereignty debate underlines all of these concerns.

Anglophone non-involvement is not limited only to the political realm. There is little Anglophone involvement in mainstream social associations and NGOs. Simply put, Anglophone youth is separated from mainstream social involvement in Quebec.

Several delegates commented that they did not feel represented by any political party or government. They expressed the feeling that the Anglophone community is taken for granted.

Recommendations

- ❖ Have Anglophones take more responsibility for our own destinies. We must organize ourselves
- ❖ Create provincial Anglophone and other minority Commissioners in order to better reflect the current reality of Quebec
- ❖ Make government and political party documents available in English

Topic 4: Should there be a distinction between the needs of various Anglophone communities?

Representatives stressed that while there are some common concerns shared by all Anglophones, there are different priorities among different groups.

There is a real distinction between being Anglophone in a rural area and being Anglophone in an urban setting. Simply, Anglophones in rural areas do not receive the same level of service as Anglophones in urban areas.

In fact, the top priority for regional representatives was the supply of services ranging from nutritionists, to drug prevention programs, to education.

Urban representatives were primarily concerned with employment. Whether the problems concern black youth or Jewish youth, more needs to be done to assist all young Anglophones find work. There are some initiatives that should be closely examined and possibly copied. For example, the Jewish community's initiative called "Pro Montreal" is a privately funded program that aims to keep young Jews in Montreal by providing services such as grants and loans for small businesses, and a social network they can rely on. This service might serve as a model for a province-wide program.

Topic 5: What is the role of the CPJ and the young Anglophone community?

That the CPJ has no contact with Anglophone youth was acknowledged. However, there were many suggestions offered by the delegates:

- ❖ Include Anglophones on the CPJ. One possibility was to include a member from Montreal and another representing the regions
- ❖ Involve the CPJ actively in Anglophone associations. Ties should be established to Anglophone groups from civil society, universities and CEGEPs
- ❖ Prepare position papers on issues that affect young Anglophones. For example, prepare a report that investigates the exodus of young Anglophones from the province of Quebec
- ❖ Make access to CPJ information available. This is vital if the CPJ is sincere in its efforts to reach out to Anglophone youth—information on the CPJ Web page should be available in English

PARTICIPANTS LIST

Wojtek Baraniak	Moderator
Tristan Brand	
Luciano D'iorio	
Ayse Dalli	Liberal Party of Canada
Christoffer Dye	Greater Quebec Movement
Steven Eroleyi	Alliance Quebec
Chris Flavelle	
Sabrina Ford	Black Youth in Action
Rachel Garber	Townshippers' Association
Susan Grundi	Quebec Community Groups Network
Alan Hanson	Political Science Students Association of McGill University
James Hughes	EPOC
Tanya Kennedy	The Committee for Anglophone Social Action (CASA)
Patrick Lebel	Conseil permanent de la jeunesse
Dominic Mailloux	Conseil permanent de la jeunesse
Stéphanie Maynard	Quebec Farmers Association (Châteauguay Valley)
Sharon McCully	Guest Speaker
Michele Meyers	ENRICH-Kazabazua
Joseph Nancoo	Alliance Quebec
Lilly Renda	Greater Quebec Movement
Dino Sabelli	Greater Quebec Movement
Amitabh Saxena	
Susan Shive	Council for Anglophone Magdalen Islanders
Heidi Skorsky	youth Employment Services
Shirley Smyth	ENRICH-Aylmer
Isabella Tirelli	Greater Quebec Movement
Félix Turgeon	Conseil permanent de la jeunesse
Keats Wanda Lee	Lower North Shore
Mark Winkler	Canadian Jewish Congress

MEMBERS OF THE CPJ

Geneviève Baril
St-Boniface-de-Shawinigan

Youri Chassin
Montréal

Sophie Cunningham
Montréal

François Fréchette
Sherbrooke

Conel Tonatiu Garcia Ramirez
Québec

Hugo Jollette
Témiscaming

Patrick Kearney
Saint-Jérôme

Patrick Lebel
La Tuque

Sylvain Lévesque
Québec

Claudie Lévesque
Baie-Comeau

Dominic Mailloux
Sorel-Tracy

Suzanne Moore
La Sarre

Marie-Eve Proulx
Hull

Lisa Roy
Thetford Mines

Félix Turgeon
Montréal

ANNEXE

Sharon McCully's bio

Sharon McCully is Editor of the Sherbrooke Record, a 105-year-old community daily in Quebec's Eastern Townships - one of two English-language dailies in the province. She is also Managing Editor of the weekly Brome County News which she helped create in 1991.

She began her career in community newspapers 20 years ago with the weekly SPEC, the only English-language weekly in Eastern Quebec. Her stories have appeared in leading newspapers across the country.

She is the recipient of numerous newspaper awards, including the Paul Dumont Frenette Award for excellence in journalism and the Lindsay Chrysler Award for outstanding contribution to the community newspaper industry.

She is a past president of both the Quebec Community Newspapers Association, and the Canadian Community Newspapers Association, and chairman of the board of the Canadian Community Newspapers Association, a federation of 680 community newspapers situated across Canada with a weekly readership of 10 million.

While president of the Quebec association, she hosted a linguistic duality seminar at Bishop's University bringing newspaper publishers and editors from across Canada together with their French-speaking counterparts in Quebec.

She has hosted two national community newspaper conventions in Quebec in an effort to acquaint Canadians with Quebec's unique qualities. She is a published author of a book on Quebec, and is a mother of five.

She has served on several government advisory committees and is a regular contributor to CBC.