

SECOR INC

SOCIETE D'ETUDES ET DE CHANGEMENT ORGANISATIONNELS

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November 20, 1980

Committee on the Constitution
Office of the Clerk
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REGISTERED MAIL

To whom it may concern:

For several years now, I and my colleagues at SECOR have been studying the problem of language use in the work world. We have been able to ascertain that the federal Official Languages Act does not in any way deal with the language problem in the private sector, as recommended by the report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism.

The various studies that we have carried out on the use of French by employees of companies have produced the following findings and conclusions:

- The ways and means developed to settle the question of languages of work are of major importance in solving the political crisis we are now experiencing. The growing participation of French Canadians in the management of large companies and in the federal civil service has made language use in the workplace a subject of controversy.

- The question of the use of official languages in the private sector has been an issue primarily in Quebec, and only Quebec governments have to date dealt with it. We consider it unhealthy for the future of the Canadian federation that, even in the sectors falling specifically under federal jurisdiction according to the constitutional division of powers, there is no significant effort to encourage increased use of French in the workplace. That this language issue concerns the federal government as much as the Quebec government is, in our opinion, a tenable position.

- Although the status of French and Francophones in private industry is not as deplorable as we are sometimes led to believe, and although notable progress had been made in this area before language legislation was adopted, we still feel that government intervention, in the form of Bills 22 and 101, was necessary. Without it, the promotion of the use of French in Quebec would surely have been a slower, more superficial process, and measures would have been applied very differently from company to company.

- The Quebec legislation deals with language and the promotion of French; it does not directly promote the social mobility of Francophones.

- The promotion of French in the private sector presents a number of challenges to Canadian companies. It certainly tests the ability of heads of firms to react effectively to government action which, in a number of them, touches a sensitive chord.

Attitudes toward the promotion of French in the business world will be an indication of the determination of Anglophone managers to support the principles underlying the Canadian federation. We feel that, in a federation characterized by two official languages, companies should reflect, at an administrative and operational level, the representation of language groups within their clienteles and their staffs. This obligation should always apply, regardless of where in the federation the head office is located. The promotion of French may, of course, involve extra (although quite moderate, on the whole) expenses, but these are counterbalanced by the potential advantages resulting from the effective economic integration of the two language groups within the Canadian federation.

The proposed resolution concerning the patriation and amendment of the Constitution makes no reference to the use of French in the workplace. Consequently, I would be glad to present our ideas to the Constitutional Committee. Appendix A contains a collection of some of these ideas.

Yours truly,

(signed)

Roger Miller, D Sc
Professor at the University of Quebec
in Montreal and senior associate at
SECOR INC

Encl: Appendix A