

DB:

Bonjour, hello, and welcome to "Close-up on Canada," the podcast from the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada. I'm your host, Daniel Béland.

This season, we are talking about how Canada is facing the future in an age of global uncertainty.

Pour la première saison de notre balado, nous allons parler de la façon dont le Canada fait face à l'avenir à une époque de grande incertitude.

Today we will talk about language policy in Canada and, more specifically, the future of the Official Languages Act. Enacted in 1969, this legislation made both English and French the official languages in Canada. It is the legislative keystone of Canada's official bilingualism, and it created the position of Commissioner of Official Languages, whose dual role was described as "the protector of the Canadian public and the critic of the federal government in matters respecting the official languages."

To discuss the ongoing debate about the modernization of the Official Languages Act, we have the pleasure to speak to Graham Fraser, formerly Canada's longest serving Commissioner of Official Languages, who has been involved in many important issues concerning the language rights of Canadians. Graham Fraser is currently a Senior Fellow at the University of Ottawa and a member of the board of the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada.

Hello, Graham, and thank you for joining us today.

GF:

Hello, Daniel. Thank you for asking me.

DB:

So to start off, let's set the scene of our topic today. Why do we have legislation around official languages in Canada in the first place? Where does it come from?

GF:

Well, the origin really has to be seen as happening in the early 1960s, 60 years ago. After the election of the Quebec Liberals in 1960 there was a growing sense of language nationalism in Quebec, and in 1962, there were 26 *créditiste* MPs who were elected who deprived first the Conservatives and then the Liberals of a majority government. In contrast with previous deputations, the *créditiste* members were from small-town Quebec, they were, with one or two exceptions, relatively uneducated, they were working-class and most of them were unilingual francophones.

So, every day somebody rose in the House of Commons and asked: why? Why is it that the orders of the day were in English only? Why is it that the announcements at the station were in English only? Why is it that the guards could not welcome their

constituencies in French as well as in English? And it went on day after day all through the fall of 1962. In December 1962, Lester Pearson, who was then the leader of the Opposition, made a speech in which he said if he were elected he would set up a royal commission. In the spring, he was, and he set up the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, which began its hearings in 1963. In 1965, after hearings across the country, they recognized that there was a serious gap in

I had the chance to go to Montreal as a correspondent for Maclean's in 1976. I thought that I would be spending that time looking at how Montreal avoided bankruptcy after the Olympics, and then Bourassa called an election, I got on the election plane and I got off ten years later. I spent the next ten years following the Levesque government and the Bourassa government between 1976 and 1986, and then moved to Ottawa. But I continued to be interested in Quebec politics and would keep going back to

Ensuite, en 2005, il y a un autre amendement de ce qu'on appelle la partie 7, la loi qui a imposé l'obligation sur toute intrusion fédérale de prendre des mesures positives pour l'épanouissement des communautés de langue officielle en situation minoritaire. Puis, on n'a pas défini ce que cela voulait dire une mesure positive. Et à cette époque là, j'étais commissaire et je croyais que c'était mieux comme ça, de ne pas avoir une définition qui pourrait contraindre et que ce serait bien d'avoir une évolution de la compréhension de cette obligation.

l'anglais au Québec n'est pas comparable à la situation du français dans les autres provinces.

Mon seul commentaire à ça, c'est qu'on a tendance à voir la situation du français au Québec en regardant les anglophones à Montréal. Bon, à Montréal il y a 600 000 anglophones, donc à 600, on peut se protéger pas mal. On peut appuyer les cinémas, le théâtre, les journaux. Mais il y a 300 000 anglophones dispersés sur le grand territoire du Québec, et être anglophone à Trois-Rivières, Sherbrooke, Gaspé, c'est un

