

CONFEDERATION OF REGIONS, NEW BRUNSWICK-PARTY

As the Confederation of Regions Party continues to grow, we must keep in mind that, unlike the existing parties, we have a principle which commands us to consult the people on all major issues. At this time, as we prepare to lay down our policy declarations which will eventually become the basis for our platform in the next election, we are addressing the process of presenting this information to the people of New Brunswick.

Language legislation is the result of a policy, as is all other legislation. The Confederation of Regions, New Brunswick-Party does not believe it is necessary to legislate language. Although we have prepared a draft statement on language, it has not yet been presented for final ratification by our general membership and therefore cannot be made public at this time.

We are prepared, however, to enunciate our principles with respect to government influence in the private responsibilities of its citizens.

We see language as being a non-statutory entity, as sacred and personal as one's culture or religion. We believe that the choice of language spoken should rest with the individual. If that individual chooses to further his or her education (and therefore opportunities) by learning fluency in a language other than his or her own we believe that that person should have that choice. We also recognize that government has an obligation, where resources allow, to provide for that education in an institutionalized setting such as a school, community college or university.

We support the establishment of a universal, quality, elective language program commencing in grade one. The language of the program would be determined by the dominant language of the regions.

Our feelings with regard to language are deeply rooted in the knowledge that it is a living, evolving entity which never stops changing, even when under pressure to resist. As our "Global Village" continues to shrink as a result of the communications explosion, it becomes more apparent that language should not be legislated.

We are aware of the argument that language and culture are inseparable, and to lose the former is to seriously jeopardize the preservation of the latter. We must question, however, the idea that the English and French cultures are more "worth saving" than the other cultures in Canada. . . because that in effect is what we have said by legislating the primacy of two languages over all the others spoken in this land. Are we saying that an English-Canadian has a constitutional right to preserve his culture through the legislation of the English language while at the same time an Iranian-Canadian is doomed to losing his culture because he cannot pass Farsi on to his heirs? We believe that, if the will is present, "Allophones" will be well able to provide for their culture preservation by themselves, and we would expect no less of English and French-Canadians. Doubtless

both "official" languages will be different years from now, as they were different years ago. Our cultures will be different too, but hopefully not because of some failing of government legislation, but because of the free interchange of ideas and customs.

During the language debates of the 1960's Belgium was noted as an example where two "official languages" could operate in one country. Recently Belgium has acknowledged the failure of that policy and has returned bilingualism to the realm of personal and private choice.

One country where multilingualism does work is Switzerland but, we feel, only because of the proximity of France, Germany and Italy. If Switzerland was an island, one of the three languages would eventually come to dominate through the free market of verbal exchange.

Languages are like people. They are born, grow, mature, and eventually die. If assimilation is a dirty word, then we are a very dirty people with filthy ancestors. Assimilation has been taking pace for thousands of years, with the tacit approval of those undergoing the process. All of the European languages trace their roots, in varying degrees, to other languages. All have evolved. All have changed, but not all will survive the test of time.

Latin itself has been preserved only through the efforts of a strong religious community. It was not legislated or enforced. It was kept alive by resolve. That resolve on a personal level is lacking in Canada today. The original concept of using institutionalized bilingualism to foster national unity was a noble one . . . but we now find ourselves more divided than before. To that end legislated bilingualism has failed. Also it seems that as a means of saving a culture it will likewise fail.

Bill 22 gave way to Bill 101 in Quebec. Then Bill 101 was strengthened in December of 1988 by legislation denying the rights of an English Quebecker to erect any outdoor sign in his language. Bill C-72 was passed in the Federal Parliament to "improve" upon the official languages legislation extant at the time. In New Brunswick we have seen the passage of an Act respecting the Equality of the Two Official Language Communities (Bill-88). Now there are calls for the entrenchment of this nebulous piece of legislation into the Canadian Constitution.

We are now seeing calls from Canadians wishing to return the choice of language to a personal freedom and not a legislated instrument of social policy. Our party has a firm resolve to implement a "fair, just and equitable" language policy once we are elected. We are confident in the belief that our principle of less government influence in the personal lives of its citizens is a noble goal.

We are also confident that, when released in the near future, our official policy on language will be accepted and supported by New Brunswickers of both major linguistic communities. We are already delighted with the support we have been receiving from French speaking New Brunswickers who want a better future

for their children. We will also seek means to satisfy the needs of the 12.1 per cent of New Brunswickers who cannot function in English. French Services will be available to them so they will feel at home in this province.