

## BILINGUAL PROBLEM WAS FOUND AT STEELTON

BY TORONTO STAR'S SPECIAL INVESTIGATOR

### Easy to Teach English in the Sault But It is a Different Story in Steelton.

The Toronto Star is sending reporters around Ontario investigating the teaching of French in the public and separate schools. This is what was sent from the Sault last week:

"The town of Sault Ste. Marie and that of Steelton are like Toronto and the Junction used to be before annexation took place. It is difficult to tell where one leaves off and the other commences, geographically speaking. From an education point, however, they are miles apart. Both have a French population with its consequent bilingual problem, but there the similarity ends.

The Soo has a population of about 11,000, and of these about 800 are of French descent. Yet it has no bilingual school. Steelton has a population of about 4,000, of whom about 500 are French. It has a bilingual school, though under a different inspector to the others visited.

There are two schools in the Soo in which the French children attend. From the first moment they enter the doors till they leave the schools they hear not a word of French. Why? Because those in charge of affairs long ago came to the conclusion that if these two schools were to remain on a par with the other schools in the town they would have to make English the sole language. They don't mince matters in telling you about it, either. They hold the view that if French is taught along with English all the pupils suffer, English as well as French. They can quote you examples from outside places, but usually they say, "Just take a look at Steelton."

Are the French satisfied? They are in 99 out of a hundred cases. You very seldom come across a French child at Steelton, where French is taught, while quite a number come from Steelton into the Soo, and there would be more if rooms could be found for them in the Soo school. Who are those who are dissatisfied? In the few instances in which complaints have been heard they can be traced in almost every case to an outsider.

**No Attention to Nationality.**  
A visit was paid by The Star to one of the Soo schools. There are in attendance there 160 pupils, 60 of whom are of French descent. The teachers pay absolutely no attention to the nationality of the children so a special census was made for The Star. In the different rooms they were asked to give their nationality, and those who were French were asked if French was the language of their homes. Here are the results:

- First Room—26 French, 16 use French exclusively at home.
- Second Room—13 French, 4 speak it at home.
- Third Room—9 French, 3 speak it at home.
- Fourth Room—12 French, 7 speak it at home.

Altogether there are 70 of French descent there, thirty of whom use French exclusively in their homes. Of the other thirty some use French and English, others English alone, and yet no French is taught in the school or even as a means of imparting English.

"How do you do it?" was asked.  
"It's the simplest thing in the world," came the answer. "We merely teach them English."

"They all start off together—French and English?"  
"We don't make a particle of difference between them."

One found only words of praise everywhere for the work of these schools. The Sisters of St. Joseph, all English nuns, and all duly qualified are in charge.

### A Difference at Steelton.

At Steelton the reverse of what is being done in the Soo is taking place. The school, which is not a young one, like most bilinguals visited, has apparently been given a free hand in the matter of regulations as to what shall be taught, with the result that, like others, it turns out pupils who know a little French and a little English, not much of either, and little of anything else.

There are at present about 300 pupils in attendance, 130 of whom are French. About 70 are Italians, a dozen or so are of other nationalities, and the rest are English-speaking. Previous to September last, all these pupils were jumbled together in the different classes. French had to be imparted to the children of French parents. So while these French pupils were being taught French, the English, Italians, and the rest sat twisting their thumbs, some two hours a day.

Year after year the school fell farther behind. A few pupils, possibly half a dozen in all, have passed the entrance examinations in as many years, and they were looked upon as specially gifted.

### Now Trying Another Tack.

In September last a new principal took charge. He has divided the school in two sections, one French, the other English—that is, English, Italian, and all the other nationalities.

"The French parents want French taught, the trustees say teach it, so that is what I am doing," the principal told The Star. "Those who were the poorest I put in two classes, first book and second book. The teachers there are French, and the pupils are being taught French. They are also being taught English, and they must be taught English, and as far as I am concerned they will stay in these classes—I don't care how long it takes—until they know enough English to pass into the junior third book, and so be

able to keep up with the other pupils and not keep those others back."

In the room containing the senior second and junior third classes, the new teacher, who came in September, found seven of the French pupils so backward in English that she had to make a sort of special class for them.

#### What the Italians Do.

How about the seventy Italians and the dozen or so of other nationalities? One was told that no trouble is experienced with them, or was experienced even under the old system. They come to school to learn English, and in the beginning 90 per cent. of them never heard English before, their parents being newly emigrated to Canada. The Italians and the others start in the A.B.C. class with the English pupils. Not having to bother with any other language they soon pick English up and after two years at the latest they can talk pretty well in that language.

"Could you do the same with the French?" was asked.

"If they had nothing to learn but English they would learn English faster than do the Italians and the others," was the reply.

#### Would Teach English First.

This authority put forward the view that the present system in vogue in the bilingual schools is just the reverse of what ought to be followed, assuming that French is to be taught at all. "Teach them English first," The Star was told, "and when they know English then you can teach them French without harm. To-day it is French first and English afterwards.

"Take the case of the Italians. In nearly every instance their parents know no English at all, and Italian is what is spoken in their homes. Yet these children learn English and experience no difficulty with it. They find their knowledge of English helps them with Italian, and when they know English perfectly, that is in proportion to their age and years at school, they find it is only a matter of a few months' study when they are equally as perfect in their knowledge of Italian. The same would take place with the French were they taught English first, which isn't being done in 240 out of 250 bilingual schools in Ontario.

"If I could have my way I would mix all these pupils together, English, Italian, and the rest. Then as soon as the French knew English I would start to teach them French grammar. More than that, I feel assured that I could take a mixed school like this one and at the end of five or six years every one would know his own language, and English as well, and at that keep up with schools which have no such problems. To do that, though, they must first of all know English. That is the reason those bilingual schools, almost without exception, produce such lamentable results—because the children are taught French first instead of English."

#### Teachers' Qualifications.

Besides the lack of a proper method there is something else which has probably helped to keep the school at Steelton behind; and that is the employment of teachers not regularly qualified and those whose knowledge of English was far short of what it should be. There has not been a year when such teachers were not engaged. Last year there were five teachers there, three of whom were French. This year there are six teachers, two of whom are French, and of the six only two are regularly qualified.

Thessalon, Dec. 8.—About midway between Blind River and the Soo, a mile and a half from the C. P. R. station, lies this village of Thessalon, which has a French population of about 600 out of a total population of 2,000. It has no bilingual school. There are on the roll of the school 200 pupils, 100 of whom are French, yet not a word of French is used by the teachers or is taught in the school.

The new school which Thessalon boasts is probably responsible. When it was built, three years ago, the French were still satisfied to allow their children to attend the wholly English school, and when asked expressed their willingness to contribute to the paying of the debentures issued.

construction was begun and the school, which cost \$30,000, was opened a little less than two years ago.

Shortly afterwards a move was made to have another school erected where French would be taught. The idea seemed to be quite popular with the French, but when they came to raise the necessary money they found they would still have to contribute to the other school. To pay for two schools was beyond their means, so they are to-day without the bilingual one.

#### They Are Learning English.

The result is that the children there are learning English. There are seven teachers employed, five of whom hold professional certificates, and the other two district ones. In this there is a big contrast to the standing of teachers employed in bilingual schools in towns of the same size as Thessalon.

The primary class in the school is divided into two parts, junior and senior. In the junior are sixty pupils about twenty-five of whom are French. In the senior are forty children, twenty-five or so of whom are French, making a total of fifty French children in the A.B.C. class, and yet the teachers make use of nothing but English.

What English the children know when they start to school is not much, one was told. In the majority of cases French is the language of the home.

"Are the French children able to keep up with the rest of the class?" was asked.

"In almost every case, yes," was the answer. "It is the exception and not the rule for a French child to be backward in that school."

The Thessalon school experiences the same trouble as do all the other schools in New Ontario, in that many of the pupils are very irregular in their attendance. In particular the French children's terms at school are very short, parents often taking them away early for work.

#### Another Steelton School.

In a preceding letter, the bilingual school at Steelton, on the outskirts of Sault Ste. Marie, and its unsatisfactory attempts to teach English was described. Within a stone's throw from it is "The King Edward School," where half the pupils attending are the sons and daughters of foreigners. There are 250 on the roll, of whom 45 are Italians, 30 are Finlanders, 20 are Russians, while the other are Swedes, Norwegians, Hebrews, and the like. All of these are taught English from the first day they enter school, and many of them never heard it before their parents came to Canada and to Steelton to secure employment in the iron and steel works there.

"We have no trouble in teaching them English," one of the teachers told The Star. "We put them all in the same class from the very beginning, and as they hear nothing but English they pick it up remarkably fast. Some of them are quite expert in it at the end of two years, while all of them know it well enough after three years to make all their other studies in it. The trouble is that at that time most of them leave school and start to work in the steel plant."

The Star paid a visit to the primary class, of about thirty children, over half of whom are foreigners. One paused at the door while the kiddies sang "The Maple Leaf." In spite of the many tongues represented, the pronunciation of the words was not bad. The teacher said that in September last hardly one of the foreigners ever knew his name in English. To-day they all sing out "I see a cat." "It is a box," and all the rest, almost like the Anglo-Saxon children. In the teacher's opinion, her ignorance of the many languages spoken by her pupils helps rather than hinders their learning English.