

# Thornton On Bi-lingualism

In order to keep before Manitoba electors some of the essential facts regarding the effect of bi-lingualism in the public schools of Manitoba, we republish a few extracts from the speech of Hon. Dr. Thornton, Minister of Education, delivered a few days ago in the Manitoba Legislature:

The provision in the Act which authorizes bi-lingual teaching in the public schools is Section 258. It appeared there in 1897 as a result of the Laurier-Greenway agreement. It is not the intention at the present moment to discuss the circumstances which called for its appearance in that agreement and in the Public Schools Act, but to show what is involved in this provision, and the actual results of its working in our educational system. The clause reads:

**"When ten of the pupils in any school speak the French language, or any language other than English as their native language, the teaching of such pupils shall be conducted in French, or such other language and English upon the bi-lingual system."**

No similar clause appears in the School Act of any other Province of the Dominion, in British Columbia, in Prince Edward Island, in New Brunswick, no provision concerning the language to be used in the public schools is noted, and the teaching of any language other than English is not provided for.

From these extracts it will be seen that some of the provinces recognize no other language than English, and some others give a partial recognition to the French language. Ontario gives limited recognition to German and French, but in Manitoba alone is equal standing given to any other language.

The next point to be noted is the sweeping character of the provisions of this section. It says the teaching of such pupils shall be conducted in French, or such other language, and English. The status given to the language is not merely that of a subject to be taught as an educational accomplishment as, for instance, the teaching of French, German, Latin or Greek in the school curriculum, but under certain conditions the other tongue takes its stand equally with English as the medium of instruction.

English is the language of the country, yet the other tongue, under the condition of ten children in any school district, receives official recognition as the language of instruction, and this recognition is accorded to every language that may be spoken in the province, whether the people speaking it are British subjects or not.

It is to be noted that the clause is imperative in its language. The words are "SHALL BE." In communities of mixed nationalities each one has as much right to recognition as any other, providing it has the necessary ten children in school. If the clause were given effect to as it stands it would produce utter confusion. In schools where there are three nationalities having the requisite ten children it would be necessary to divide the school into three parts, each having a teacher of its own. The results in actual working are that the language of the majority, whatever it may happen to be, is recognized, and the several minorities have to submit. There are thirty-six schools which could demand to be taught in two languages besides English, and five schools in three languages besides English.

From these various examples it will be seen that the clause not only puts English in the second place, but does not protect the other languages, only giving a place of priority to the language which, for the time being, is in numerical ascendancy.

In addition to these thirty-six schools already mentioned there are one hundred and ten others where the admixture of nationalities is quite as marked, only the minorities for the time being have not the necessary ten children. The arrival or departure of a single family may alter the situation at any time, and the majority may, in turn, be deprived of its precarious privilege. In nearly one-fourth of the schools which are actually conducted on the bi-lingual plan we find French, German, Polish or Ruthenian children receiving instruction in some other non-English tongue, but not in their own.

Some years ago the school district of St. Francoise de Salle, St. Norbert, was a French bi-lingual school. The Ruthenians began to settle in the district, and as soon as they had a majority at the annual meeting, they secured control of the school board. They wanted to employ a Ruthenian bi-lingual teacher instead of a French bi-lingual teacher, and they had the necessary number of children, having some 40 or 50 of school age. The French still had some 15 children attending the school, and the two factions came to an agreement to build a two-roomed school, one room being operated as a French bi-lingual school, the other as a Ruthenian bi-lingual school. A year or so later the French room was closed.

From the school district of River Ranch, a ratepayer writes:

**"We had a good teacher until last year.**



Now the trustees have hired a Ruthenian bi-lingual. The teacher is not really qualified to do the work. Have not sent our children to school since the holidays. It is giving the English a poor show in their own country."

So far as I have been able to judge, large numbers of the non-English-speaking people want to be educated entirely in English, and if left to themselves would readily acquiesce.

During the last few months there has been a steady movement towards the elimination of teachers who have been teaching English entirely, whether of British nationality or otherwise.

Demetrius Rostocky was engaged to teach the school in Zamek district. When he began work the Polish element demanded that he teach Polish. The Ruthenian element wanted him to teach Ruthenian, and the Swedish element wanted him to teach Swedish. These various factions could not agree upon the question of straight English in the school, and when Mr. Rostocky pointed out that he could not teach all these languages, as he did not have time, he was invited to leave.

Leon Brown went out to teach Van Dusen school, but he was requested by some of the trustees to teach Polish, and the following day the demand was made that he teach Ruthenian. When he took charge of the school he began teaching the children to sing "God Save the King," and one trustee immediately objected to this. In a very short time the people practically withdrew their children from the school and stated that they did not want a Russian teacher and that they could have a bi-lingual teacher BECAUSE THE LAW ALLOWED IT. Mr. Brown speaks Polish and Ruthenian, but insisted that he should teach only English, with the result that at the end of the first month he withdrew, because he had only one or two scholars coming to school.

In December, 1915, in Janowski, the same disturbance has arisen between Ruthenian and Russian sections. The Ruthenian section is striving to get control of the trustee board so that they may have a bi-lingual teacher put in to supersede the English teacher.

In consequence of information supplied to the department by the inspector and others, Mr. Stratton made a special investigation in these districts, and a letter has been received, dated December 23, from a reliable informant to this effect:

"The teacher at Moose Bay school, No. 1459, says the trustees have informed him that they intend to get a bi-lingual teacher in that district after the New Year, and, in the event of not being able to get one, will close the school house for at least six months. This school is situated next to the following school districts: 'Janowski,' 'Wieden,' and 'North Lake.'"

Bi-lingual teaching requires the preparation of bi-lingual text books, and we have here bi-lingual text books in French in German, in Polish, and in Ruthenian, all authorized by the Advisory Board, and any other language is equally entitled to the same consideration.

Bi-lingual teaching is not necessary as a means of education. The English language is being taught to non-English children, and education is being carried on successfully where straight English teaching is adopted, not only by teachers who speak it as the mother tongue, but by those who have acquired it. This is true not only in the cities and towns, where the surrounding conditions and associations assist in the work, but is also true in the rural districts of solid non-English nationalities.

There are several nationalities that have never asked for bi-lingual privileges, and do not want them. The Icelanders have been in this province for forty years. They have never dreamed of asking bi-lingual privileges, either before or after the insertion of clause 258 in the Act. They realized that the door of opportunity was open to them everywhere, provided they equipped themselves to enter.

A grave injustice is being done to the children who do not receive a satisfactory education in English. Without that knowledge they grow up under a continuous handicap. We wish to give them the same consideration as is accorded to our own children, to fit them to earn their way through life, and to take their place as citizens in our Canadian nationality.

This question must be dealt with looking forward, not backward. Each generation must take its responsibility, and act in the spirit of its own times with an eye ever watchful of the result to succeeding generations. We are building today for the Canada of tomorrow, and our common school is one of the most important factors in the work.

In this Dominion we are building up, under the British flag, a new nationality. We come from many lands and cast in our lot, and from these various factors there must evolve a new nationality which shall be simply Canadian and British.

If the legislators have confidence in the statement of the Minister of Education, a man generally regarded as truthful, intelligent and moderate, need they hesitate in coming to a decision, "looking forward, not backward," in dealing with the question of education that lies at the very foundation of the state?

Are we afraid, or ashamed, in this province to declare once and for all time, that our institutions must be British and Canadian, and that English must be the one language receiving statutory recognition?

If the present is not the opportune time to make it known to the rest of Canada and the world at large that Manitoba is a British-Canadian province, in fact as well as in name, when do wobbly-kneed sons of the Flag think the opportune time is likely to arrive?

Will the day ever come if the Legislature recognizes by statute the "rights" of any language other than the English language?

The fortunes of any party are trivial and wholly insignificant, compared with the fortunes of Manitoba as a province of the Empire. The future of Manitoba is the all-important question.

What is the influence behind the foreign language speaking citizens of this province that turns them aside from encouraging their children to learn the language of the nation? Dr. Thornton has referred to some influence; will he name it?

Is the future of this province to be left in the hands of immigration agents and immigrants—desirable, as many of them are—or is it the intention of the Canadian people, with British-Canadian ideals, to say how the most important function of government—education—shall be carried out?

A great direct question is facing the people of Manitoba. Our legislators cannot dodge it. The compromise of today may become the fixed laws in years to come. Do the citizens of Manitoba desire that any compromise shall be made?