

# **BI-LINGUAL SCHOOLS IN CANADA**

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Bi-Lingual Schools in Canada by C. B. Sissons

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# BI-LINGUAL SCHOOLS IN CANADA

*By*

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## INTRODUCTION

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THE language problem in Canada is but a part of the larger problem of developing a community life which will give freedom to peoples diverse in language, in race, in religion and in social customs.

Before English-speaking Canadians, predominantly Anglo-Saxon and Protestant in type, and French-speaking Canadians, predominantly Latin and Roman Catholic in type, had fully learned to live together a great wedge of "foreigners" was thrust into our Canadian life. Hardy Scandinavians, persecuted Jews, freedom-loving Poles, peace-seeking German-speaking Mennonites, Russian Doukhobors with their peculiar "Tolstoyan" doctrines, illiterate Ukrainian peasants with their nationalistic "inteligencya"—these, and a score more of widely differing groups have been thrown together indiscriminately. Little wonder if there has been friction. The wonder is that things have gone so smoothly.

The fact is that Canada is confronted with a more serious task than most Canadians realize. We have encouraged immigration; we have profited by immigration; we cannot escape the

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responsibilities which this immigration has brought us. Now that we begin to encounter difficulties, it is simply childish to talk of deporting all the foreigners, or to blame these foreigners because they are not like English-speaking Canadians. Whether we relish the prospect or not, Canadians are not and cannot now be a homogeneous people. Whether or not they are to be a united people depends largely on the attitude of Canadians of the older stock, who are at present responsible for National leadership.

It would be as unwise as it would be futile to attempt to force all these immigrants into one mould. Some of us have never quite understood that the older Ontario type of Canadian, however admirable, has not been the only type of Canadian. If ever one type is evolved it will be catholic enough to incorporate in itself the best elements in the various peoples who are making Canada their home.

Each group has its own distinctive contribution to make. Treasures of literature, art, music, devotion, patriotism, idealism, industry, the heritage of the rich and varied civilization of Europe, may be brought to Canada—if only we are intelligent enough to appreciate their value and facilitate their transfer.

The conservation of our human resources is the task to which Canadian statesmanship should apply itself.

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Language is at once the symbol and medium of national culture. The language question in Canada is not then simply which of two or more tongues shall be the means of communication. It is a question as to whether certain types of culture will survive or perish—a question as important to the older Canadian people as to the newly-arrived immigrants. Consciously or subconsciously this is doubtless the reason why the interest in this problem has been so deep.

The older English-Canadian has maintained that there must be a united Canada. He has recognized that this meant a common language. Unfortunately, knowing only one language, he has not realized what other languages have meant or might mean. Other groups, treasuring their own languages and all for which their own languages stand, have sometimes failed to grasp a higher Canadian ideal and, disregarding other considerations, have spent their energies in maintaining the "rights" of their particular groups. Lack of mutual understanding has generated heated controversy and thus precluded the discovery of a means by which both ideals might be realized. Policies have been determined by political expediency rather than by considerations of national welfare.

Under these circumstances, Mr. Sissons has made a valuable contribution to the solution



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of one of our outstanding national problems. He may not have been able to view the situation from an entirely impartial point of view—who can?—but he has succeeded in maintaining an open mind and discussing the subject dispassionately—in itself no small achievement.

The attempt to disentangle the French-Canadian problem, the German Mennonite problem and the problem of the Slavic immigrants, and the analysis of the varying situations which confronted the authorities in the different provinces, are particularly valuable.

It is most encouraging to find that our university men are beginning to turn their attention to our practical Canadian problems. Surely the time must soon come when every under-graduate will be given an intelligent understanding of these problems; when our post-graduate students will be encouraged to give themselves to social research; and when our university professors will recognize that their greatest contribution to the advancement of learning and world progress is in devoting themselves to the problems of America rather than those of Europe and in holding up ideals for the future rather than inculcating the ideals of the past.

J. S. WOODSWORTH.

Winnipeg, October 16th, 1916.

## PREFACE

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SOME years ago it became evident that educational conditions in Manitoba required ventilation. According to the terms of Confederation and the subsequent Acts by which our present Dominion was created, education was left to the care of provinces. However, immigrants invited by the Federal authorities were poured into Winnipeg and distributed throughout Manitoba. The provincial authorities had failed to keep pace with the problem, and in many parts of the province decent school privileges were denied the newcomers. The results of my investigations in this field were published in a series of signed articles appearing during the fall of 1912 in the *Toronto Globe*, and later were summed up in an article in the *University Magazine* of February, 1913.

In Manitoba the matter of bringing schools to the people, difficult enough in the pioneer stage of any country, was complicated by the language question. From the first the very considerable French and German elements in the population were allowed the privilege of

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using their own language in the elementary schools. With the coming of many thousands of immigrants from continental Europe, a demand arose that these same rights be extended to various nationalities. These demands were acceded to, and the difficulties of administration of the school system were greatly increased, difficulties which had never been slight by reason of the unwillingness of the late Archbishop of St. Boniface to accept the compromise of 1897 as final. In Manitoba, then, questions of religion and language were both pressing, being more or less interwoven, and by many people hopelessly confused. The administration of the day appeared lethargic and helpless, if not compromised. It was thought that criticism from without might assist in spurring the Province to come to the aid of the thousands of children who were entering it on the invitation of the Canadian people.

The information then gained and the conclusions then arrived at form the starting-point of the present work. With Manitoba I naturally compared Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia. Then I turned to Ontario, where the language controversy, after twenty years of comparative quiescence, had been revived by the publication of the celebrated letter giving the purport of a conversation