

Camille Laurin, Father of Law 101

The name of Camille Laurin, Minister of State for Cultural Development will always be attached to the Charter of the French Language and to its Policy Statement which he fathered and defended. Very early in the course of elaborating and drafting, the minister realized that it turned out to be impossible merely to amend Law 22, as had been first believed. “Law 22 made the mistake of having two divergent objectives at the same time: the one, the Francization of Québec and the other, institutional bilingualism.” It was therefore necessary to go outside the framework of this law and to devise a new one. This is how the Charter of the French Language was born.

“There was no doubt in my mind that Québec, with a French-speaking majority, could only have one official language, shared by all its inhabitants, the language of communication and social cohesion, the working language of the administration and of all the institutions that depend on it, the language of community life, and the medium through which those who use it to reach their full potential at all levels move with ease and well-being. It was necessary to pass a law for us and not against the others, that gives a logical and just place to the majority and the minorities, depending on their relative importance, and puts the resources and support of their democratically elected government in the service of the individual freedoms and aspirations of a majority that has long been poor and dominated.

[...] The Charter of the French Language affects all Québécois without exception; it proposes that everyone participate in French in the life and the progress of a people that seeks to achieve its unity while remaining faithful to its French tradition and having the greatest respect for its constituent parts.

[...] It cannot be said clearly enough: the full flowering of the culture and society of non-Francophones can only be accomplished when the majority believes that the future of its culture is secured by fundamental guarantees. [...] It may be necessary to remember that there is an enclave in North America, it is French and it is here, in Québec. This patent fact is the cornerstone of Québec’s language policy. And it would be an error to fear that the Francophone

community is turning inwards. In fact, there are not many peoples who are more open, more eager to share, more prepared to build a new Québec with you.

[...] When we talk of a French Québec that is precisely what we mean: if French culture is to continue to exist and to prosper, the shared language in this part of the continent where a large majority of the population is Francophone must be French—in the same way that English is the shared language in Ontario.

[...] Québécois are those who participate in life in Québec and who find it natural to contribute to building a more humane city in a country that can be theirs just as legitimately by adoption as by birth.

Camille LAURIN, *Une traversée du Québec*, Montréal, L'Hexagone, 1999