



April 5, 2004

Comments by Alliance Quebec President, the Rev. Darryl Gray, on the Montreal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities

The reality is that Montreal is a bilingual city. Despite the insistence by the Charest government that Montreal is a French city in a French province, French-speaking and English-speaking Montrealers work things out every day in a civilized manner.

French is the most widely spoken language in Quebec and is a vital job skill. It is required for most jobs with the City of Montreal. Montrealers who have come to Canada from other countries are offered free French language training while Montrealers who were born in Canada are not. We propose that all Montrealers be given an equal opportunity to improve their French language skills. Equal opportunity in education is an important human right.

Equal opportunity in employment is also an important human right. The city needs to ensure that all Montrealers have an opportunity to work for the city or the police force. Both the municipal work force and the police department should reflect the population they serve.

There needs to be a better system of civilian oversight of Montreal's police force. When ever there is a questionable incident between the police and a citizen there has to be an effective and transparent process to get to the truth and take appropriate action. This is essential if all Montrealers are to have confidence that the police are there to serve and protect them.

The city needs to ensure access to municipal services, including public transit, in both French and English. Equal access to public services is an important human right.

When the Mayor of Montreal, Gérald Tremblay, introduced the proposed Montreal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities on December 10, 2003, He emphasized the important of respecting international standards of human rights. Mayor Tremblay said:

"Fifty five years ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights became the cornerstone of the rights that are today part of the foundation of democracy and heritage of which humanity may be proud...we are introducing a unique and original proposal which strikes a balance between rights and responsibilities as well as promotes integrating values and rights in municipal operations."

Montreal has a special connection with the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* because its principle author was a Montrealer, Professor John Humphrey of McGill. Professor Humphrey also set up the Human Rights Division of the United Nations, of which he became the first director.

There could be no better way for Montreal to honour John Humphrey than to ensure that the principles of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* are reflected by the *Montreal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities*. The preamble of the proposed Charter says:

“Whereas the citizens of the Ville de Montreal benefit from the rights and freedoms proclaimed and guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of December 10th, 1948 and by the international and intercontinental instruments of human rights to which Canada is a party and by which Quebec has declared itself bound;”

Alliance Quebec sees this commitment as an important step forward and we urge Mayor Tremblay and his administration to follow through with concrete action to implement these human rights obligations in Montreal for the benefit of all Montrealers.

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