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# **Reflections on Bill 1 and the Path Toward an Inclusive Quebec Constitution**

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Submitted by  
the Greater Quebec Movement (GQM)  
to the National Assembly's Commission des institutions

**[www.mgquebec.org](http://www.mgquebec.org)**

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## **About the Greater Quebec Movement (GQM)**

The Greater Quebec Movement (GQM) ([www.mgquebec.org](http://www.mgquebec.org)) is an independent, Quebec-based think tank dedicated to strengthening social cohesion between Quebecers of all backgrounds. Founded in the run up to the 1995 referendum, the GQM promotes the idea of a “Greater Québec”—a society in which linguistic and cultural communities build a shared, inclusive future.

The GQM focuses on public policy research, education policy, and dialogue across linguistic lines. Its work emphasizes individual empowerment, proposing constructive solutions such as integrated French/English learning environments and a new written constitution for Quebec. The GQM regularly contributes to public consultations and provides expertise to policymakers on issues involving language, education, and the evolution of Quebec society.

## **Introduction**

What is the ideal society? It is a perennial question debated since the dawn of civilization and still very much alive today. It continually asks us to evaluate our principles, values, beliefs, and aspirations, and it outlines our vision of the kind of society we wish to build.

It is a difficult question to answer, and no doubt it influences why we are here to discuss the proposed *Bill 1, Québec Constitution Act, 2025*. This bill is a substantial piece of legislative work—ambitious in scope and intent. It offers its vision of the ideal society the drafters believe reflects a consensus among Quebecers. And while the Greater Quebec Movement has long supported discussions on adopting a Quebec Constitution—indeed since our inception in 1995—we believe some important preliminary observations are required. These observations will form the bulk of our presentation.

## **Background: The Social Contract and Quebec's Constitutional Debate**

In post-medieval intellectual circles, debating “man in the state of nature” was all the rage. It served as a backdrop for questions of state power and legitimacy. For those who rejected the Hobbesian view that might makes right, it opened the door to the notion that free people enter into a social contract with one another to build a society of their choosing.

The social contract is, in a primal sense, the foundation of a society's constitution. So, when the failure of the Meech Lake Accord reopened the question of how the Canadian state ought to be reformed, several of us took interest in ideas circulating within Quebec's nationalist movements—particularly the call for a popular consultation to draft a new social contract in a Quebec constitution inspired by broad public input.

This exercise offered an opportunity for dialogue—particularly for minority communities such as those first represented in our group—providing a chance to exchange viewpoints and envision a Quebec state that could act as a guarantor of their fundamental rights, reducing their dependency on Ottawa as a protective “big brother.”

### **The GQM's Historical Position and Engagement**

With that in mind, our founders, Giuliano D'Andrea and Richard Walsh Smith, appeared before the Bélanger-Campeau Youth Commission in 1991 as representatives of the Equality Party Youth Commission, where they called for the drafting of a Quebec Constitution. They hoped to foster constructive dialogue and develop areas of consensus among Quebecers.

Since 1991, our consistent theme now that we are the Greater Quebec Movement (GQM) has been that we are not segregationists—we want in. We have long believed that French as the common language must not only be learned but mastered, and that greater dialogue between our communities is essential.

We have held to these principles for 35 years. Despite making significant inroads promoting ideas such as integrated schools, dialogue within the English-speaking community has proved difficult to organize. The community is fractured, and with good reason it remains suspicious and distrustful.

This is our greatest lament. What should have been a process of dialogue and inclusion has instead become an exercise where our community stands as a bystander—watching a process in which we have had negligible input and where we do not see our identity, concerns, or particularities reflected. What could have been a moment of inclusion and discovery has remained locked in old stereotypes and has, at least for our community, been a failure.

## **The Marginalization of the English-Speaking Community**

From the perspective of political discourse, Anglo Quebec seems effectively dead. Once an important presence across much of Quebec, our community has become silent, absent, discouraged, and disengaged.

We have learned French—although, in our view, not yet sufficiently to compete effectively in a francophone work environment. To be fair, our schools are far better at teaching French than they were two generations ago. But in truth, it is difficult to obtain impartial assessments of how successful our integration has been; objectivity on this topic is rare.

Even defining our community is a challenge. What is an Anglo-Quebecer, and who has the authority to define it? This question remains one of our major points of contention with the government. By designating a subset of the community as “historic Anglos,” the government deliberately limits the size of the community and marginalizes it further from the francophone collective, calling its legitimacy into question. The message, in essence, is that “historic Anglos” belong to an exclusive club whose rights—defined by the majority—will be respected, but who nonetheless do not truly belong.

Thus, a fiction is created: possessing a certificate of eligibility, not one’s culture or history, becomes the determining factor. One could be an English prince—say Prince Harry—and should he decide to reside in Quebec, he would still have fewer rights than thousands of Italians, Greeks, and others who obtained eligibility certificates and are thus considered “historic.” The irony would be comedic were it not so insulting.

The community did not ask to be defined this way. This alone illustrates the gulf between how minority communities self-identify and how the government chooses to perceive and depict them.

## **Montreal Targeted and Alienated**

The same holds true for stereotypes concerning multiculturalism, interculturalism, and the debate over whether Canada is multicultural rather than bicultural—and how this plays out in Quebec’s integrationist model.

Consider the United States, often idealized as a melting pot. It is undeniable that the American character has been profoundly shaped by immigrant culture, values, and history. American cinema illustrates this vividly. *Rocky*, a classic movie, stands as a multicultural ideal if multiculturalism is defined as pride in one's roots. It is more than a boxing movie; it portrays an underprivileged young man from a Philadelphia neighbourhood striving to be accepted into the mainstream. The priest, the mobster, the bartender, the butcher, the shy girl at the pet shop—all contribute to its unmistakably ethnic texture. Yet *Rocky* is quintessentially American and presents no threat to American cultural cohesion. Few, if any, Quebec or Canadian films have achieved what *Rocky* has.

How multiculturalism is perceived within communities often diverges sharply from how it is discussed externally. The negative portrayals of multiculturalism often rely on stereotypes suggesting resistance or refusal by ethnic communities to integrate.

In the Montreal region, a majority of residents are not mother-tongue francophones—and this trend is growing. By alienating Anglophones and Allophones through measures that have neither sought their consent nor acknowledged their concerns, and that many perceive as deliberately targeting them, Quebec risks alienating this entire region.

The danger does not lie in francization or shared social values. Quebecers are right to value principles such as gender equality and may legitimately choose to organize state institutions along the lines of *laïcité*. But such values offer no guarantee against backlash, particularly when religious identity—often far more powerful than linguistic identity—is involved. No genuine social contract appears to be present when consent is ignored and public discussion is reduced to assuming that “this is what Quebecers want.”

### **Education and Language**

A Quebec constitution offers an historic opportunity to modernize the province's constitutional framework and to better reflect its social and linguistic reality. Among the most meaningful ways to achieve this is through constitutionally recognizing, and thereby helping enable, the prospect of more integrated French–English public education in which francophones and anglophones could attend classes and learn together— a model focused primarily on French but with strong second language emphasis on English that would help promote both linguistic mastery and social cohesion.

International experience shows that high bilingual proficiency is achievable. Education systems in Scandinavia, the Netherlands, and parts of Asia have succeeded in producing students who master both their national language and English. While Quebec's context is unique, these models provide valuable research points.

We are not suggesting that a Quebec constitution mandate integrated schooling. Rather, it should create the legal framework to permit shared classes only if parents and educational administrators express interest and only when supported by academic research.

Any integrated model would require testing through a pilot school, grounded in proven international methods and evaluated carefully before broader adoption is considered.

### **The Legal Challenge: Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Quebec Law 101**

Currently, minority-language education rights are protected by Section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and recognized in provincial laws such as the *Charter of the French Language* (laws 101 and 96). However, only Section 23 enjoys constitutional supremacy, meaning all other statutes must conform to it.

The problem is that Section 23 – to our understanding – only effectively guarantees segregated linguistic schooling. This model is appropriate for provinces where francophone minorities must protect themselves from an often-overwhelming English-language social environment—but is incomplete for Quebec's unique context. In many regions of Quebec, Anglophone children live in areas in which French is present but not dominant, yet they must attain competitive fluency in French to thrive there professionally. Likewise, there are areas of Montreal where English is spoken less often, putting local francophone children at a disadvantage to learn such a vital international language. So, francophone children stand to benefit from exposure to native English speakers within a structured integrated educational environment.

### **Constitutional Recognition of Integrated Education**

To make such integration legally viable, a Quebec constitution should offer a legal infrastructure that would not mandate integrated French–English public education but would allow for it should

parents— and educational administrators heeding their wishes— agree to create it. In such a scenario, the common learning setting might be established through a joint agreement of existing English school boards and Francophone service centres.

To aid in this effort a Quebec constitution should:

- Affirm that participation in integrated schools does not forfeit minority-language education eligibility under Section 23 should Anglophone students wish to retreat to it at some point;
- Clarify that Section 23 may not be used to compel segregated institutions where integration is desired by parents; and
- Encourage innovation in educational models that reflect Quebec’s dual language needs, yet a civic cohesion principally built around French.

In doing so, a Quebec constitution would not diminish existing rights but would expand choice, ensuring that linguistic minorities retain their protected status while embracing new educational forms that promote overall Quebec unity rather than linguistic division.

## **Conclusion**

Despite our concerns mentioned outlined above, the spirit behind Bill 1 is a step in the right direction. It opens important discussions that must be undertaken. Our concerns are multiple, but we have chosen to set aside the legal ramifications—where the bill clearly oversteps its jurisdiction on many fronts. These issues will no doubt be addressed by many other interveners, and we have little to add on that point.

Our principal concern is process. A promising idea has been presented—one that should have engaged the population in meaningful discussions about the societal goals and values that ought to form Quebec’s first principles.

As a group originally composed largely of members of minority communities, the Greater Quebec Movement strongly believes in finding a made-in-Quebec solution to our shared challenges. As



noted above, we believe that any version of a Quebec constitution should include provisions allowing for the creation of integrated French–English schools with shared classes.

Unfortunately, this bill, as drafted, does not move in that direction. Instead, it sidelines minority perspectives, ignores minority interests, and drives a single ideological project through a democratic process that has been short on consultation—one that risks dividing rather than uniting Quebecers.

**We therefore recommend that this bill be tabled, and that broader, more meaningful consultations be undertaken with the population of Quebec, so that appropriate amendments may be drafted, presented, and debated.**

### **Summary of Key Points**

- Bill 1 raises fundamental questions about Quebec’s societal values and constitutional direction.
- Minority communities had only limited opportunities to contribute meaningfully during the drafting process.
- As currently drafted, the bill may unintentionally reinforce existing divisions rather than strengthen inclusion.
- The definition of 'historic Anglos' is inaccurate and alienates the broader English-speaking community.
- Montreal’s diverse population risks being marginalized by measures perceived as exclusionary.
- A Quebec constitutional framework should explicitly allow, though not mandate, the creation of integrated French–English public schools where shared classes are possible when supported by parents and educational administrators.
- Section 23 of the Canadian Charter may currently restricts the ability to create integrated educational models; a Quebec constitution should clarify that integration is permissible when desired by parents and when minority-language eligibility is preserved. Integrated schooling should be explored through pilot projects grounded in best international practices to strengthen bilingual proficiency and social cohesion.

- A Quebec constitution should encourage innovative educational approaches that reflect Quebec's dual-language reality while reinforcing French as the common civic language.
- A made-in-Quebec solution like a Quebec constitution is very desirable but requires genuine dialogue and participation before enactment.
- We recommend the bill be tabled and a more meaningful consultation with all Quebecers begin.