

Subject: English on Commercial signs.

Date: Sat, 15 Jan 2005 14:42:48 -0800

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A MESSAGE FROM ERNIE CRIST

I have submitted a motion to District Council regarding the use of the English language on COMMERCIAL signs. To avoid putting Council into a potentially embarrassing situation in future, I have suggested that, notwithstanding that commercial signs in North Vancouver District may be in a language other than English, they must convey the same message in English. I suggested that, notwithstanding any other factor, English be on top of any other description on such a commercial sign and that the letters in English be equal in size to any other letter on the sign.

The reason I submitted this motion is that it has come to my attention that in some areas of the Lower Mainland the concentration of immigrants sharing a common language is such that English and its use is being overwhelmed in some cases. This has resulted in commercial signs which no longer indicate in English the intent of a business or commercial enterprise. I take a purely scientific approach to such matters including the contribution to Canada by people from various cultures.

However, I received a call from a Radio Station who had been made aware of my motion. The Station quoted me as saying that I felt this issue could become controversial in light of Vancouver's Pacific Rim location and vicinity to Asia, the large influx of immigrants from extremely populous areas and the subsequent concentration of people in certain areas of the Lower Mainland sharing a common language other than English such as is the case in Richmond BC, for instance.

The Radio Station also quoted District Mayor Janice Harris who stated she did not think that there would be a seconder to my motion when it comes up this coming Monday, much less that the motion would be accepted by District Council. She stated that she is not aware of there being a problem in North Vancouver.

Competition between different cultures and languages is an ongoing phenomena in the world and is as old as the human race itself. It is a fact and has been part of the struggle for survival. All cultures are competitive by nature. This competition can be aggressive or be part of slow and natural evolution. Given a peaceful environment, different cultures existing in a common area have a tendency to merge into a new culture with the "best" characteristics of the merging cultures becoming part of the new culture.

Where it can become a problem is when, in conjunction with this scenario, there are also different languages at play as is the case in the Lower Mainland where the influx of people from a specific culture and a common language other than English has the potential to overwhelm the local and/or existing language. In such a case the merging of cultures is far more arduous and is pregnant with potential conflict. In such a case there is a tendency to keep people apart and inhibit the evolution of a new culture.

This is another way of stating that if, by way of example, English and French Canada had the same language instead of two separate languages the political conflict between English and French Canada, despite cultural differences, would have been resolved long ago. Both cultures would have merged more or less. On the other hand the adherence to two different languages, albeit possibly unavoidable, kept Canada divided more or less to this very day. The result is that Canada, contrary to pedestrian opinion is not a one nation state but a two nation state. The scientific definition of a nation being a LARGE concentration of people, sharing a common language, a common territory, a common culture and a common history.

Canada but especially BC is thinly populated. Some cities in Asia have more inhabitants than all of Canada combined. English Canada does not have a distinctive culture and to the extent that it exists, it is non assertive and non cohesive. As a result the use of English especially in the Lower Mainland and in BC rests on a weak foundation. The only offsetting factor is the vicinity of the largely English speaking USA. The English Historian Arnold Toynbee said that history is the struggle of cultures and that superior cultures (those best suited for a given environment at any given time) have a tendency to become dominant which, depending on conditions, can be rapid and/or slow, peaceful and/or violent.

The issue here is not to pass judgement and/or draw a comparison between one specific culture and/or language over another but to avoid potential conflict when a potential qualitative change is more than a possibility and should be taken into consideration in the Lower Mainland. If there is an understanding now that commercial signs must be in English, municipalities in the Lower Mainland can save themselves a great deal of potential controversy in future. This even includes the District of North Vancouver.

That is the reason for my motion which Mayor Harris said she will not support. However, such a stance is the very reason why we may have costly problems in future.



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