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I am not certain what has motivated the Quebec government's proposal to raise tuition fees at McGill, Concordia and (perhaps) Bishop's to unaffordable levels. The suggestion that a few thousand Anglophone students are somehow threatening the French language in Quebec (or even in Montreal) is absurd. Not only do many of those students learn a reasonable amount of French, and use it when appropriate, but their numbers are put in the shade by the far larger numbers of Anglophone tourists who visit Quebec every year.

It's true that many Canadian universities outside Quebec have higher rates for international students and (to a much lesser extent) for students from other provinces. The first is unfortunate, and only justified by the contribution that it makes to the operation of the university. In Quebec, the plan seems to be that the planned \$20,000 tuition increase for foreign students will not stay with the university that has to collect it (and lose students thereby): it will be taken from them and used to subsidise other universities. As for students from other provinces: those differential fees (though much smaller than what Quebec now proposes) are also invidious, and a mutual agreement to stop charging them would be an excellent idea. Quebec has entered into agreements with other countries to treat their students as local. Would they make the same sort of bilateral agreement with the rest of Canada that they are happy to make with France and Belgium? Sadly, it seems unlikely.

It doesn't seem plausible that raising fees will encourage students to speak French more. Do François Legault and Pascale Déry really have romantic visions of Madison (from Chicago) turning to Logan (from Edmonton) at a party and saying "Hey, Logan, seeing that we're paying so much to be here, maybe we oughta be practicing our French a little, huh? Know any good irregular verbs?" It might get a grin out of Logan, but probably no language practice. McGill's (refused) offer to require French classes would have been far more effective.

Is the idea to drive these students away, so that their voices will not disturb the peace of the Quebec streets? Even that makes no sense. Montreal has a huge non-student anglophone population, who will continue to speak English. As for Bishop's, I doubt if Legault and Déry have ever lost much sleep worrying about what language is spoken in the quiet streets of Lennoxville. In most other parts of Quebec, most of the English that gets spoken is spoken by or to tourists. To be consistent, perhaps the CAQ should institute a hundred-percent tax on hotel rooms rented to anybody without a Quebec driver's license, but I don't see this happening.

But driving so many students away would have one big effect within Quebec: it would do terrible damage to the Anglophone universities, maybe irremediable damage. It's just possible that Legault and Déry have overlooked this, in their enthusiasm to hear less English on rue Sherbrooke. I would hate to think that it was the point of the exercise.

Quebec has several excellent Francophone universities, notably the Université de Montréal and Laval. The last two, in particular, are ranked in the top few hundred in the entire world. But Quebec also has one university that is always ranked in the top hundred, often the top fifty: McGill. Driving away thousands of students — not just the ones paying the highest fees, but in many cases the ones who had their choice of many top universities and chose McGill — would make it difficult for this high profile to be maintained. Surely the CAQ cannot be intending such an act of cultural and intellectual vandalism, merely out of pique that the top-ranked university in the province is not francophone? Would Quebec really be better off with no world-class university than with one that operates in English?