

However, editors are not to be pitied too much, because . . .

Notice this is still the author speaking, and there is always, at least on the surface, a degree of aggressivity or perhaps a somewhat aggressive form of complicity between authors and publishers. I have often worked on both sides. Of course I know how authors react to their publishers, whom they always view as the ones with the money and the power. It always seems to the author that the publisher does not attend to them well enough.

● (1510)

**Hon. Royce Frith (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):** And without any literary savvy.

**Senator Hébert:** Indeed, without any literary savvy and who do not understand why their masterpieces gather dust on their shelves. I return to Mr. Blais's text:

But editors are to be pitied the most because they are organized and hold some negotiating power with governments.

It is true that governments in the past listened to publishers. They listened to the Association des éditeurs de littérature générale. They listened to the Association des éditeurs de manuels scolaires. It is no longer true at the federal level. Right now nobody is listening to publishers. I know publishers' representatives tried to meet with senators on the other side today. They could meet none or very few. So Jean Éthier-Blais says publishers are organized and hold negotiating power with governments. Again I quote:

For authors, on the other hand, things are very much different. At the publishers' they will come against a stone wall.

A handful, five, ten at best, live by their pens.

Let us try a comparison with other honourable professions, law, medicine and even journalism. According to Éthier-Blais, already in Quebec, there are maybe five authors, ten at best, who live by writing books, by their pens. Such a statement is an unbelievable acknowledgement of the poverty of a society. Quoting again:

Others earn between \$700 and \$1,000 a year by their pens.

Seven hundred or a thousand dollars a year by their pens! Quoting still:

—that does not allow for any luxury but it is status recognition.

A recognition of the status of the author, meaning that you may be starving but you nevertheless receive \$700 a year in copyright and you can consider yourself having a status. You do not give away your books totally. So it is not a real income but a nominal and ironical recognition of your status. It goes on:

. . . but it provides for a certain upgrading of the writing profession.

Listen, I have made \$700 this year with my books. That is something. Mr. Blais goes on to say:

[Senator Hébert.]

The government shows disrespect toward intellectual activities. We rank among the slaves in that greedy society.

I saw that the word "money" stirred something on the other side. In fact, I am getting some information that senator David seemed to need urgently. I will try to make sense of this. The VAT in the European Community and taxes on books in Europe in 1990—this information is not too old. So in Germany, the normal rate is 14 per cent for the VAT and for books, it is 7 per cent. But there was no special low rate in 1990. There was one in the previous years, because the rate was lowered from 14 per cent to 7 per cent. In Belgium, the normal rate is 19 per cent and the rate on books is 6 per cent. In Denmark, the exception that I mentioned earlier, they kept a flat rate for books and other things. In Spain, where the normal rate is 12 per cent, the rate is 6 per cent on books. In France, where the normal rate is 18.6 per cent, it is 5.5 per cent on books. In Greece, where the normal rate is 16 per cent, it is 3 per cent on books. You see the difference in rates. You cannot say that the rates were lowered every year. In Ireland, the rate is 0 per cent on books, while the VAT is 25 per cent. In Italy, the normal rate of the VAT is 19 per cent.

You see what awaits us. They talk about 7 per cent, but you see where we are headed. The government read also those numbers. In some countries, rates are at 25 per cent now. The Conservatives are doing some small calculations. They are good at those. They say: Well, by God, we start at 7 per cent. They wanted to start at 9 per cent, but there was too much protest. They reduced the tax to 7 per cent. Someday, when people are used to it, they will increase it to 20 per cent and 25 per cent, like in Ireland.

In Italy, the general rate is 19 per cent and the rate on books is 4 per cent. In Luxembourg, the general rate is 12 per cent and the rate on books is 6 per cent. In the Netherlands, it is 18.5 per cent and on books, it is 6 per cent. In Portugal, the VAT is 17 per cent and on books—you are still taking notes, Senator David—0 per cent. In the United Kingdom, the general rate is 15 per cent and on books, 0 per cent.

Jean Éthier-Blais warns us that a decrease in book sales will affect literature first and foremost. It is clear that it is not the recipe books that will be affected first. It is evident that it is not the books which explain how to stop smoking in three days, or how to repair your garage at no cost, things like that, that we are talking about. We are talking about literature. That is what will be affected first.

It is not the worst, but the best literature that is always hurt first. I will give you a small personal example. I will not abuse of that because I told you I did not want to get too personal with my examples.

Marie-Claire Blais is certainly one of the most famous Quebec writers. There are others but nonetheless she was a big name a few years ago. She was a very young girl from Quebec City when she was discovered by chance by Father Georges-Henri Lévesque who had sensed in a letter she had written him that here was a great talent. As he was from Quebec City, he