

● (1720)

They are the kind of people in our society to whom this is an unfair tax. It is an inhibiting tax, not just for their pleasure or leisure but perhaps for their whole productive personal future.

As I have mentioned, a number of European countries have taken this into consideration. In fact, on the question of literacy, for some reason Canada has fallen behind not only the United States but many countries in Europe in how it has dealt with this issue over the years. In Europe, literacy is rightly seen as a condition fundamental to democracy and as something to be encouraged, not inhibited.

In the last several decades, we Canadians increasingly have come to appreciate and value our own cultural expression through a proliferation of Canadian books and periodicals, along with other forms of Canadian cultural expression. Our authors are acclaimed around the world, and are becoming more so every year. We rightly value these truly precious assets because they reflect our unique experiences as Canadians and because, as a people, we have a basic need to continue developing and nurturing our cultural identity.

The GST applied without relief to Canadian cultural products, including printed materials, may well make them so inaccessible that Canadians once again may lose sight of their own creative expression. But more than that, the GST will make it harder for those Canadians who are least equipped to meet tomorrow's educational challenges.

In other words, this tax, in a sense, is neutral for the winners and, in some cases, perhaps, disastrous for those who are not as fortunate as we in this chamber. True to the spirit of this government in recent years, the GST seems to slant the field even more steeply for those who will have to struggle the hardest to catch up.

For these reasons, I urge everyone in the chamber to think seriously about supporting this amendment. The Prime Minister has opened the door for us to do it. I hope that the Senate has the courage to take the first step and walk through that door, and to do so now.

[Translation]

Hon. Solange Chaput-Rolland: Honourable senators, first I would like to answer to Senator Jacques Hébert. He gives me a lot of credit when he says that Quebecers are very anxious to hear what I am going to say about that tax.

If I pay great attention to Senator Hébert's comments, it is because of him that I am an author before being a senator. In 1963, he was the publisher of my first book, *Dear Enemies*, a

small publication that still sells today and that was written in co-operation with a famous author whose name was Guetilyn Graham.

He wants to know what is the position of this author on the GST.

Last week had to be fateful. I have published my sixteenth book, strangely entitled *Agony and Relief*. The title becomes probably real today since I am torn between the agony of being an author and the relief of being loyal to the party I have the honour to belong to. As you, Liberal senators, have been loyal to your leaders all along those tactics against the GST.

I will read to you two paragraphs that say exactly what I think as an author of the application of the law to books. They are taken from a letter I wrote on September 20th, 1990, to Senator Lowell Murray, who will forgive my indiscretion. If I took the trouble to write it, you can be sure I really meant it.

I am writing to you as an author, sir, and not as a senator, in order to call upon you to try and understand the danger that threatens French and English literature in Canada.

GST will burden our publications so dramatically that our identity as Quebecers and Canadians may lose its strength and richness because of it. The authors who form a distinct and essential social group know how important that tax is to reduce the heavy deficit but all of them, including myself, believe with the publishers and booksellers that the publishing industry should be exempted of that tax . . .

I do not think, Madam, that what I am saying is funny at all. It goes on:

. . . that may jeopardize the sale of our books in our society.

If I had stood up in this House tonight to speak on the GST or its effect on our books, I would have spoken against it. As much as you, I think that this tax is dangerous. Also as much as you, I am loyal enough to assume that when the prime minister states on television that he himself is extremely worried with the effect of that tax on our books, it is my duty as a senator to make him understand and to commit myself in front of my Conservative colleagues to remind him of his commitment. It is also my duty to remind as much as I possibly can to Mr. Wilson, the Minister of Finance, that he ought to either abolish it or amend it.

Believe me, there are many instances in life, as you know better than I do—but I have a certain experience as a writer