

ers to buy Quebec books at reasonable and competitive prices is to put at risk the very existence of those books and show a lack of concern for what they represent for people who are fully entitled to derive their education and entertainment from books made and written for them, that resemble them. And Quebec consumers have been enjoying that privilege for such a short time—

The GST would be slammed on all books, including school books. But many people—up to sixty in the case of a reading book—are involved in making these books. School publishers represent 41 percent of the publishing houses in Quebec and generate nearly 67 percent of the revenues in the industry. The literary field represents 44 percent of the industry, but generates less than 30 percent of the revenues. Finally, “other” publishing houses (for musical scores for instance) represent only 15.1 percent of the industry and generate only 3.4 percent of the revenues.

The Coopers and Lybrand study entitled “Consumer Sensitivity to Increases in Book Prices”, which I mentioned earlier and was prepared by the Department of Communications, shows that everytime the price of a book goes up by one percent, the sales go down by 2.5 percent. We must remember that. It also underscores the fact that, for all types of books, even a 10 percent increase in price would deter more than 25 percent of the people interviewed from buying new releases and to wait for them to be published as paperbacks. If prices were to rise 20 percent from the original sales price, 50 percent of the people interviewed would not buy, while the other 50 percent would. The study dealing with consumers also shows that among the consumers who would stop buying Canadian books first would be the households where French is the most commonly used language, the people who have completed a college degree, the students and the households with the highest or the lowest gross income.

Considering the present circumstances in Quebec, with its small population pool, can we afford to turn books into an elitist product?

Moreover, in the school sector in Quebec, the school boards do not have a separate budget for book acquisition. It is part of their global budget. It can therefore be expected that an increase in the price of books will result in a decrease in the number purchased. Then, lower sales will make the unit price go up. Will the school book become a privilege? Finally, let it be known that the school boards budgets are already insufficient and do not allow to achieve the goal set in Bill 107, that is that every pupil must be given one basic book per compulsory subject. Even that cannot be achieved at the present time. So, what do you think will happen if there ever is GST on top of everything?

Publishing is a high-risk industry. It involves high production costs that must be distributed over a modest number of copies. The more complex the productions are (such as school books, mathematic or chemistry textbooks, illustrated children books, general and specialized literature that must be illustrated such as history books that very often need colour illustrations, geography books, architecture books, the

so-called gift books, art albums, visual art books, et cetera), the higher the production costs and the more difficult it is for the national publishers to provide consumers with quality books at competing prices. Unfortunately, the Quebec consumer cannot benefit from the economies of scale as do most of the foreign publishers in countries where the cultural activity and industry in general is strong enough to be self-sufficient.

Increasing the risks of the Quebec publishing industry will lead to a strict selection of safer products—potential bestsellers—and to ending the publishing of new and unknown authors. No more risks! It will mean the end or at least a very substantial decrease in the production of more specialized books with a restricted market in, for example, social sciences, essays, special scientific fields. We will quit trying to compete in certain basic sectors. Right now, French-speaking university students in business administration, sciences and many other fields mostly rely on English textbooks that would be too costly to have translated or produced in French. Imagine what it will be after the GST!

Unfortunately, it is impossible for the GST to be implemented without those projections becoming real. The Quebec and Canadian French-speaking consumers will find less books from Quebec and Canadian authors (in this respect, studies by the Canada Council and the Department of Communications have shown that national publishers publish the greater number of national writers, and if it is true for English Canada, it is even more so for French Canada). You should not be under any illusions, because Canadian subsidiaries of American or French publishers are not big publishers of Canadian books. Rather, they sell books from their own country's authors, which is totally normal.

They will also be faced with much less varied Canadian products. Because of higher prices, would consumers not be right to buy the cheapest products? Francophone writers from Canada will fight a losing battle against the American paperbacks or books of science and technology.

Let us listen to what the Don't Tax Reading Coalition, a particularly representative group, is asking us.

“With its long democratic tradition, the Government of Canada has given books a special rank in its cultural policy and has recognized, with concrete actions, its preferential status.”

It is the whole history of Canada that proves that.

The reasons behind this approach and these decisions - the exceptional educational and cultural value of books - justify their existence as much today as before. Trusting that this respect for books and for reading is part of the Canadian values, we specifically ask that books not be taxed. By doing so, Canada will follow in the footsteps of the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, Portugal and many other countries that recognized that books are essential to their intellectual well-being and cultural fulfillment and that did not tax reading materials.

Given that the Government of Canada has, with vision, conferred a preferential status to food products, which are