

That aspect of the question was completely ignored by Senator Simard in his speech on March 1.

I hope Senator Simard — he will be able to read my speech since he is not here today — will realize that the GST on books aggravates the problem of illiteracy in this country. A study published in September 1991 by Statistics Canada concluded that more than one-third of Canadian adults had at least, and I quote:

— some difficulty in dealing with reading, writing and arithmetic.

The study also revealed that 16 per cent of Canadian adults were, and I quote:

— limited in their capacity to read

and are incapable of meeting most of the demands of daily reading.

The economic cost of a poor education and illiteracy must be borne by other Canadians and their governments. Eliminating the GST on books would certainly help reduce this burden in the short and long term. The country's economic situation and the quality of the cultural life of all Canadians would certainly be enhanced.

In 1988, the Canadian employers' task force on illiteracy estimated the direct annual cost of illiteracy at \$4 billion for Canadian business and \$10 billion for society in general. This study on the impact of functional illiteracy on production is only an estimate, but it clearly shows the negative impact even a slight increase in illiteracy rates can have on the economy.

In his speech on March 1, Senator Simard recommended that his colleagues reject the bill. In my opinion, he failed to take advantage of the opportunity that was given in this debate to correct his myopic partisan stand and decided to attack the Liberal Party and its leader instead. In his case, that came as no surprise. For once, I would have liked to have seen him address the fundamental issues and set aside strictly partisan considerations. Is that too much to ask? Canadians who are paying through the nose because we have this damned GST on books don't care who scores politically. They just want us to get rid of an iniquitous tax that strikes at what is noblest in the individual: his intelligence, his potential and his thirst for freedom.

Ten months before this bill was tabled, Senator Simard claimed to be very concerned about the fate of the publishing industry in this country, and he gave the impression he would like to see changes in the Excise Tax Act to provide relief for the publishing industry. In a question he put to Senator Murray on November 19, 1991, he said, and I quote:

Nevertheless, the tax on books is a problem.

[Senator Corbin]

He asked whether the government would propose an exemption or measure that would — and I will quote what he said:

— foster the sale of books and thus provide relief to editors and potential buyers — I would like to get from Senator Murray assurances that, like several of us, he will keep doing his best to bring relief to this segment of the industry.

That was on November 19, 1991, ten and a half months after the GST took effect. Is that the same Senator Simard who, sixteen months later, ended his speech on March 1, 1993 with these words:

I urge you not to support Bill S-14.

The government that the senator supports is bitten by the same bug.

The last two speeches from the Throne contained pronouncements of pious intentions. The government seemed serious about fighting illiteracy.

To be sure, I admit that the government contributed a little to literacy programs, but the total absence of specific measures to exempt reading matter from the GST is overwhelming proof of its inconsistency and lack of courage.

Some claim that exempting books, periodicals and newspapers from the GST would make the tax harder to collect because books and periodicals are found in all kinds of stores. This argument does not hold up. Just look at what happens at the cash register. Businesses must handle an amazing variety of taxable products and others that are non-taxable. Labelling methods and cash registers that contain computers and software for this purpose can quickly and efficiently classify items on the basis of which provincial and federal taxes do or do not apply. High technology comes to the rescue in collecting the GST, as it could help in exempting books from the GST. It is just a matter of doing it.

The argument that exempting books and magazines would complicate the system for collecting the GST does not stand up at all!

The most alarming thing is that the GST affects just as much those who need to buy books for their development and advancement. No one needs to have a doctorate in literature or economics in order to see that such people stand to gain the most by making themselves more effective and capable in all fields of human activity. The GST has in effect made books, periodicals and even newspapers luxury items. Is there any better way to downgrade intellectual values?

Senator Simard said that he was concerned about the cost if Bill S-14 passed. He estimated it would be \$125 million. No doubt he got that figure from the government. He asks how we would make up this shortfall if we removed the GST on books.

In fact, he should have put the question differently, because the absolute cost of imposing the GST on books is far from