

expression, and to permit all Canadians to express the country's many cultural realities.

Until now, the Canadian people have benefited from these measures. Despite the fact that Canada is relatively young, that its population is scarce, and despite the strong foreign cultural trends sweeping over it every day, Canadians have managed to recognize and define themselves through their own writers.

The Canadian consumers could gladly say that to the East as to the West, books were equally accessible to all families, whatever their means.

The fact that the written word has never been taxed in all the history of Canada shows the importance the people and their leaders—when these leaders listen to the people, which is not always the case—attach to this unique medium for knowledge and the expression of human thought.

Taxing books is extremely serious and bears a lot of consequences, whatever the rate or enforcement mechanism. It denies the fundamental values that have always been recognized by the Canadian people and supported by the successive representatives of its government, whatever the party.

The imposition of the GST on books and magazines, discriminatory in the way it will limit their affordability, will produce or the Crown revenues estimated at about \$13 million or 0.0005 per cent of total revenues expected from the GST, that is \$24.5 billion.

You can imagine what a trivial amount it is for the national coffers, unless you totally reject all the disastrous results I foresee.

And at what price will we obtain this extremely small percentage of revenues? Taxing books in order to obtain revenues as small as these is all the more contradictory, since the government reaffirms otherwise the importance it gives to the population's intellectual development. In the document that I'm sure you all know, entitled *Goods and Services Tax, An Overview*, the Hon. Michael Wilson wrote—

It is too bad, I would really like Senator Simard to listen to me because I am quoting the Bible!

**Senator Simard:** I have been listening reverently from the very beginning!

**Senator Hébert:** Good. Now this is Mr. Wilson speaking. It's important, and I quote:

Conscious of the fact that people are one of our most valued resources, the government took steps to make literacy, education and skills development a priority.

Obviously, taxing books is not exactly the way to achieve that!

● (1540)

This concern is all the more relevant—for once, I have an opportunity to congratulate Mr. Wilson—when we realize that illiteracy plagues 24 per cent of the population in Canada and 28 per cent in Quebec. Given those facts, a tax on books would jeopardize basic needs of Canadians. A book is an instrument of knowledge but when its price is raised, it will become a

luxury item, which it is not and should never be. Does this government really want knowledge to become a luxury?

At a time when our society must react efficiently to the demands of technological change, which is both lightning fast and unrelenting, should we set for our society discriminatory conditions on training and retraining and also on the development of its most valuable resource, its capacity for thought.

Reading is the only true gymnastic of the mind. With other media, mainly electronic media, only the eye and the ear are put to work. But a book needs a reader to become real. And reading requires only intellectual abilities. The reader has to make use of complex mechanisms of the mind like logic, abstraction—

**Hon. Royce Frith (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):** Pascal!

**Senator Hébert:** Of Pascal. Imagination and memory too. It is more complex than watching television.

**Senator Frith:** You have to think when you watch television.

**Senator Hébert:** If they had the GST in Pascal's time, I do not think his works would have been published.

Somebody said that a tax on thought is a tax on ignorance.

What I said on reading is valid for any book read for recreation or education. The only difference is a more intense effort to retain the information if you read for education. No other media demands as much discipline of the mind.

Books represent the most accessible, "insidious" and democratic way to knowledge because they can be freely acquired without any prerequisite though the simple will or wish of an individual, irrespective of age, social status or educational achievement. Whatever its subject, whether it be fiction or non-fiction, a book always teaches something new to its reader who often does not even realize how much he learned or kept from his reading. This is so because the written word harbours so much information and requires such a great understanding of what is described. Finally a book is an expression of the human spirit which necessarily uses language as a vehicle. It can express anything in any field, calling on the freedom of thought both of the reader and of the author and achieving the supreme act of free communication of thought, however commonplace it may be.

By deepening the knowledge of reality, books permit appropriation of that reality. Contrary to the electronic media which are instantaneous by nature and which our senses perceive instantaneously, a book requires the reader to embark on a slow process: reading can only proceed one word at a time, requiring the reader to construct a logic. It gives power to the imagination, if I may say so.

Books are the privileged keepers of civilization, they are the memory, a durable memory always accessible and mostly inexpensive. Writing a book requires much less money than making a single movie, teleplay or radio program. It is still the most economical way to propagate and deepen knowledge, express ideas and communicate thoughts and it is still the most democratic instrument of knowledge.