

order to send them to school. Books will be bought only if there is any money left.

The real question, for Mr. Lapierre, is how much money consumers will have in their pockets once they have paid everything, and I quote:

It is not necessary to be a statistician to realize that we are in a recession. You need only take a walk on a commercial street or visit a shopping centre to see a great many stores with signs "to let" in their windows. Our sales are already down. First, the GST will apply to all sorts of things; then they will apply also to pieces of clothing and footwear. If, because of the Persian Gulf crisis, the prices of gas and fuel oil increase too, this will mean less money for us. Not to mention all the money the various levels of government are already taking out of the pockets of overtaxed consumers through income taxes, property taxes, lotteries, Hydro-Quebec dividends and all sorts of fines! Will there be any money left for books?

Jean-Claude Lapierre sees the application of these two GSTs from the concrete and daily point of view of an average businessman, already affected by the new legislation on opening hours and trying to earn a living in spite of the traffic and heavy competition of a commercial street, far from the cocktail discussions on the importance of reading.

I wonder if people realize what a bookstore means for a businessman like him who gets about 1,000 bills a month from his various suppliers. Each book is a different item. He may buy as many as ten copies of some books with a large run, but he has also a great many other objects in his bookstore, i.e. books. Therefore, an infinity of suppliers. So, for this man who is getting as many as 1,000 bills a month from his suppliers, the GST will be an unbelievable nightmare, because he has no computer: he cannot afford one. His business will get bogged down.

As I was saying, in such countries as Spain which imposed a 6 per cent tax on books, sales fell 25 per cent. On the other hand, in Ireland, sales increased 10 per cent after the government abolished its tax on books. These two examples should be enough to convince the 16 per cent of Canadians who are still resisting that the GST is a very bad piece of legislation, that should be killed without the slightest hesitation.

Along the same line of thought, last September the coalition against any kind of tax on books gave newspapermen a document on the social, cultural and economic impact of a tax on books. Coalition spokesmen held a press conference earlier today, and I must say the conference was well covered by the press. The conference was held in French because that delegation came from Quebec. Even so the English media were well represented. Allow me to quote a few particularly telling abstracts from their presentation.

Access to books is one of the essential condition of an individual's intellectual development. It is a right to literacy, culture, information and education.

From a social and cultural standpoint, taxing books is tantamount to harming the French language, impoverish-

ing our culture—and, by the same token, society as a whole—and turning books into luxury products which only the wealthy can afford to buy.

By the way, wealthy people are not necessarily the most avid readers in a society. Earlier today I saw coalition representatives circulating a petition in some kind of a book whose rather interesting slogan was: Taxing books is encouraging ignorance!

From a social and cultural standpoint, taxing books is taxing young people from poorer families. Book prices will become one more barrier preventing access to education and will worsen the drop-out trend among the secondary and high school student population. The tax will further weaken the already precarious situation of the French book publishing industry in Quebec and provide us with a front-row seat to witness the decline of written culture and the impoverishment of society as a whole.

Quebec culture therefore stands to lose as a result of this short-sighted economic measure; a book is neither a product nor a service but a tool to develop and increase one's knowledge.

Every study and every foreign experience have shown that a 1% increase in the retail price of books results in a decrease of up to 2.5% in sales.

A report published by Coopers & Lybrand Consulting Group, entitled "Consumers sensitivity to increases in book prices", prepared for the federal Department of Communications in August, 1986, and a study made by Woods Gordon, "Impacts of a multi-stage sales tax on book publishers, booksellers and periodical publishers", prepared in September 1987 for the Don't tax reading Coalition, an English coalition similar to the Quebec group I referred to earlier, showed that if the price of books was to increase by 20%, then 50% of book readers would stop buying new books.

Let's not forget our industry was able to develop thanks to the financial and political support it received from our governments. And that is why I think there is a huge contradiction between what is going on now and what the governments, both Liberal and Conservative, at the federal and provincial levels, have done for the book industry. Our industry, specially in Quebec, would never have been able to develop without the financial and political support from our governments, which have always recognized the importance and cultural value of the book industry for the social and economic well-being of our society. That particular point of view is shared also by a the vast majority of Western governments which generally apply a tax-exemption policy on the printed word and especially on books.

Quebeckers gained control of their publishing industry only recently. The vast majority of Quebec publishing houses are only 15 or 20 years old. Quebec publishers only account for 30% of sales made in Quebec.

As you see, that industry is in the first stages of development and is only starting to fend for itself.

For Quebec publishing companies, that is 90 French companies and 12 English companies in Quebec, net sales in 1988-