

System is "arbitrary and idiosyncratic and totally subjective."

Quiet censorship the Canadian way

by Roberta Franchuk

The issue of censorship is one that many of us prefer not to think about. It doesn't happen here, we shrug, hearing only of book-banning incidents in the Southern U.S. or press censorship in third-world countries.

Yet even today there are pressures on libraries, bookstores, record companies, and practically every other organization concerned with some sort of intellectual expression.

To remind people of the existence of these pressures, an annual Freedom to Read Week is sponsored by the Book and Periodical Development Council, which is an

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organization of groups concerned with freedom of expression.

How prevalent is literary censorship in Canada? Anecdotal evidence is often cited to support the claim that it is on the rise, but up until now, there has been no research into the extent of censorship pressure across the country.

To remedy this, Alvin Schrader, a University of Alberta Assistant Professor of Library Science is beginning a survey to investigate the extent of censorship pressure in public libraries. This study, in the form of a questionnaire mailed to every public library in Canada, is the first attempt to gather country-wide statistics on this issue.

A few limited surveys have been

done, notably one by Keith Walker in 1983. Walker, a graduate student at the University of Alberta, surveyed the public libraries in Alberta.

The study revealed one out of five libraries had been asked to remove material from their collection in 1983. These requests came from parents (38%) and patrons acting on their own behalf (36%).

One half of these cases resulted in some action being taken — either removing or relocating the book in question.

This survey, although limited, did reveal two important points. First, the censorship that exists is quiet. "The complaints were handled within the confines of the library-patron setting," Schrader pointed out.

None of the challenges were ever reported in the local newspapers.

Secondly, the librarians were willing to participate in the study, contrary to the predictions of those who had claimed censorship was so wide-spread no library would respond. In fact, Walker's response rate was 63%.

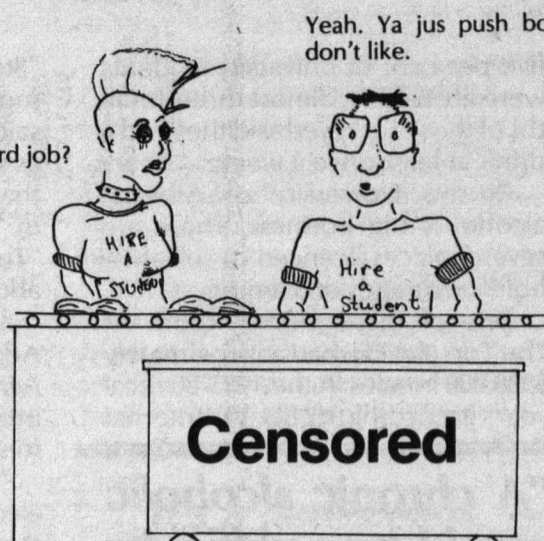
The University of Alberta has, up to now, not had to deal with challenges to their collection. The University of Calgary, however, in 1984, had two copies of *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century* seized by the RCMP, and later returned.

The justification for seizing the books? They were said to be in violation of the Customs Act.

This is a crucial point. Schrader, as Chairman of the Intellectual Committee of the Canadian Library Association, is concerned with the power customs has, unofficially, over what is, and is not, let into the country.

"We don't need groups to pro-

Is this a hard job?



mote censorship," he says, "when our politicians are doing it themselves."

As proof, he cites the customs regulations. These are guidelines for the seizure of materials by customs officials. These are not laws. Customs also has a list of specific titles not allowed into the country.

This list presently includes more than one thousand titles. It is only available through the Freedom of Information Act.

The Hoax of the Twentieth Century and *The Joy of Gay Sex* are two of the titles on the list, which contained over 2000 titles in the past. After a B.C. man challenged the customs code in federal court, new regulations were drafted which slashed the length of the list by half.

The point is, adds Schrader, that "it is not illegal to own a copy of any of these items if they were purchased before they went on the

Yeah. Ya jus push books off ya don't like.

list."

The University of Calgary had purchased its copies of *The Hoax* before it appeared on the list, so the RCMP had no justification in retaining the copies.

Bill C-114, the short-lived attempt at defining obscenity under the Criminal Code, was based on the set of regulations Customs operates under.

In effect, says Schrader, Bill C-114 "dramatically expanded the scope of what was going to be prevented from entering the country."

The Bill was the target of much angry commentary and controversy upon its introduction into the House of Commons last session.

It has now died on the order table. But what is ironic, Schrader points out, is that "what Canadians found unacceptable in Bill C-114 is now in effect at every border crossing."

Customs is not only censoring

visual material, continues Schrader. "For example, they are censoring information relating to AIDS and safe sex."

The standards for not allowing material into the country are vulnerable to different interpretations by different customs officers. And procedures for challenging the decisions are cumbersome, expensive and time consuming.

Basically, says Schrader, the whole system is "arbitrary and idiosyncratic and totally subjective."

Since Canada does not have a national censorship board, each province determines standards for obscenity decisions. This means that a movie that receives an "R" rating in British Columbia may be slapped with a "double-X" in Ontario.

Community standards, which most obscenity decisions are based on, seem to vary from province to province.

One thing to keep in mind, suggests Schrader, is "no matter how much they ban sexually explicit material, we will still have

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violence and exploitation and disregard for the rights of children."

Schrader questions "whether ignorance is an effective means of equipping children to cope with reality."

An informal information session about sexual harassment, hosted by student and staff member of the President's Advisory Committee on Sexual Harassment (PACSH), will be held on the dates and times noted below:

STUDENTS' UNION BLDG., ROOM 034
Tuesday, November 4, 12:00 noon

CLINICAL SCIENCES BUILDING, ROOM 5-101
Wednesday, November 5, 3:00 p.m.

STUDENTS' UNION BLDG., ROOM 034
Thursday, November 13, 1:00 p.m.

BUSINESS BUILDING, ROOM 1-09
Thursday, November 13, 3:30 p.m.

A short film will be presented, and members of PACSH will be happy to answer questions about sexual harassment or about PACSH. **All students and staff are welcome to attend any of these sessions.**



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