

introduced her to a publisher of that city who published her first novel which was, I believe, *Tête blanche*.

I was not yet in the publishing business at that time, so it must have been in the 1950s. She was barely 20. It was already an outstanding book.

Then, she wanted to publish another book entitled *Le Jour est noir*. She submitted it to her publisher, a small publisher of Quebec City who thought: "This is a difficult book, I could not publish it, the risks are too high." That was how, because of this Quebec City publisher, Marie-Claire Blais came to the publishing firm I was running at that time, Les Editions du Jour, to show me her work entitled *Le Jour est noir*. I remember taking the manuscript home and finishing it in one night. In closing it, I said to myself: Here is a superb book, but not—as we say erroneously and in brackets—a commercial success. In other words, it will not sell. I nevertheless told myself: it is impossible not to publish such a book even if it does not sell.

Therefore I decided to publish 3,000 copies of it, which is the minimum number of copies for its selling price to be reasonable. I had copies in warehouses for I don't know how many years. Finally, when she published *Une Saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel*, that started obviously a whole process. She won the Médicis prize, one of the great literary prizes of France. Then, I had to reprint *Le Jour est noir* I had hesitated to publish some six years earlier. All that to tell you that a little publisher, in a difficult economic situation, will tend to reject a good book, even if he believes it is good, for fear of losing his shirt in publishing it.

In the context we can expect, if the GST is ever applied to books, publishers—whether we want it or not, this is often done in a subtle way, but it will be done—will favour practical books, recipe books, How to books, sure bestsellers. Even if we know they might not be great literary works, that is what will be happening. This is to tell you how the effects of this law are more insidious than one thinks. Publishers—we must understand them to an extent—will chose the safest investments.

So, faced with a manuscript like *Le Jour est noir*, by Marie-Claire Blais, a very difficult book, the publisher will say to himself, "I think we will wait until next year, when things are better." I will quote Jean-Éthier Blais who said:

In literature, there are 90 per cent of just mediocre books and 10 per cent of good ones.

I can tell you that I have personal proof of that. It means that you must publish books that are not so good because the author is talented and if you don't publish his ou her first book—which will not sell and on which you will lose \$2,000—this person will never become a good writer. This is the kind of decision a publisher must make all the time.

Very often people would ask me why I chose to publish a mediocre book by an unknown author when I knew I would lose money. Yes, I lost money but I think this author shows promise. There is in him or her the potential for a masterpiece. So, when you accept to publish a first book you invest in the

future. Reginald Martel from *La Presse* and other critics will help teach the writer his or her job.

Do you think publishers will be tempted to do that in the new situation the federal government is offering them? I do not think so. This explains why it is not just a matter of money being lost, of jobs being lost in book stores, in the publishing trade and courier services. There is a human dimension to this problem that we must deplore. This is not what really matters in my opinion. What matters even more is the fact that all these talented writers and poets will never be published because of this tax.

As Mr. Éthiers-Blais said: you have 90 per cent of second-rate books for 10 per cent of good ones. The best ones could vanish with the not-so-good ones. And it is not the cook books or those on parapsychology which will disappear from the shelves. As I was telling you earlier, they will always be there. Do not worry, people will keep on cooking. There is no problem for the cooks.

Furthermore, the implementation of this new tax on books which, I must remind you, have always been tax free, will bring about at least a drop of 25 per cent in the sales. And that is not all: this drop in sales will have an effect on the number of copies which will be reduced also, and this will increase production costs which in turn will raise the retail price of books.

It is very easy to understand. In the 60s, I brought out a book called *Le Jour est noir*. Then, 3,000 copies were printed. Today it would probably be too many for a difficult to read book which, we know, wouldn't be a big seller. After the implementation of the GST, it means that we would have to restrict publication to about 1,500 copies. You know very well that the fewer the copies printed, the more expensive the book sale price will be.

In an article published in the Sunday, 30 September edition of *La Presse* under the byline of Bruno Dostie, Jean-Claude Lapierre, a bookseller from Verdun, not the most important bookseller in that town, he is just an average bookseller, was expressing very well the difficulties the booksellers will be faced with after the adoption of the GST. And I quote:

The new GSTs—we are lucky in Quebec, we are distinct, we have two of them. 15.56% if both federal and provincial taxes are applied, as expected, on January 1st—will drive the nail into the coffin of the book industry.

Jean-Claude Lapierre is the owner of the book store Sons et Letters.

The book is not isolated from the rest. It is an integral part of the world of consumption. Everything is tied together. Housing, transportation and food come first. As far as I am concerned, the reduction in social support of this summer, I felt it at the beginning of the school year.

People are growing poorer and who suffers from it before anyone else? The corner book store because, before buying books, one has to buy food, and buy clothing for children in