

A high price to pay

Students are concerned with the ridiculously high price of books

BY KELLI HANRAHAN

Those February blues are upon us again.

Christmas bills and tuition payments have been paid off, leaving our pockets feeling a little deeper and emptier. Talk of money is the hottest thing in the air these days, as our favourite, and not-so-favourite, politicians return to Parliament for the spring sitting. Soon Finance Minister Paul Martin will unveil the 1998 budget, which is promised to be the first balanced budget in the five years that the Liberal government has been in power. Education, thankfully, appears to be an important priority; predictions of funding towards Millennium Scholarships are increased from \$1 billion to \$3 billion. Perhaps all these student petitions and protests are finally starting to make an impact.

But there is still one more petition to which students should be penning their names.

Circulating in bookstores across Canada through the efforts of a student named Tim Conley, this petition is seeking the abolition of GST on books, newspapers and periodicals.

After facing much criticism about the taxation of reading materials, former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney promised to issue a report investigating the effects of this taxation on literacy and the publishing industry.

But this report was never made, and thus the GST remains. As students, we may be unaware or unconcerned with the extra costs that we are paying in tax.

Eric Gallant, manager of the UPEI Bookstore, estimates that the average student spends from \$500-\$700 on textbooks per semester. That amounts to about \$1200 every year, \$84

of which is GST. This is only a small figure compared to other costs that students are faced with in the course of their educational years, but it adds up.

GST was supposed to be

a tax on "luxury" goods and services. I think I can speak for many students when I say that lugging around a five pound, \$90 Biology text is far from luxurious -- not to mention the frustration of being

unable to sell your book second-hand the next semester, forced to serve a lifetime sentence with the old ball-and-chain. Textbooks and other forms of educational reading materials should be accessible

to all, yet the extra cost of tax hinders this. Sign the petition in the UPEI Bookstore, or at other bookstores across the Island, before it is sent off to Parliament in March.

Petition to ban tax on books

Students sign to abolish GST of textbooks

BY CINDY CAMERON

One man is waging war on our government's taxation of books. Tim Conley, a self-professed bibliophile from Kingston, Ontario, is distributing a nation-wide petition to ban taxation of reading material.

Conley first became involved in the issue in 1992, when he began writing letters to the Minister of Finance to argue against the application of GST to books. Before the Mulrooney government implemented the GST in 1991, reading material was exempt from federal tax. At that time, Prime Minister Brian Mulrooney promised voters an official report on the effects of the tax on literacy and the publishing industry. No such report has been completed.

Tim Conley believes that the Chretien government should execute the study, since they have maintained the GST.

"That report is overdue. If you assume the practice [of the former government], you also assume [their] responsibility," said Conley.

He claims that although the Liberal government has

shown some initiatives in support of his campaign, they ultimately must determine the GST's effects on literacy and reading levels.

"That report is a must. Not to have the report is offensive. It is an obligation they owe the Canadian people," said Conley.

Poverty has often been associated with low levels of literacy. Findings of the 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey show that 33 percent of individuals in receipt of social assistance benefits, who are living below the poverty

line, were rated at the lowest level of literacy, compared with the national average of 22 percent.

Currently in Prince Edward Island, consumers pay only the 7 percent GST on books. Yet in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland the Blended Sales Tax adds 15 percent to the price. For many consumers, reading material has become a luxury item that is most often out of their economic reach.

Ultimately, Conley would like to see the government remove GST from books and

other publications. He has sent petitions to approximately 30 bookstores across the country thus far. A similar, but smaller, appeal he organized in Montreal last year met with outstanding success.

He expects that this petition will give an even greater voice to his crusade.

"I intend to make a lot of noise," Conley claimed. "It is wrong to pay for the right to read."

Students can sign Conley's petition in the UPEI Bookstore.

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Have one too many, and you might do something you'll regret later.

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