

Mémoire présenté à la Commission parlementaire sur la réglementation du prix de vente au public des livres neufs imprimés et numériques

The Association of English-language Publishers of Quebec (Association des éditeurs de langue anglaise du Québec)

About twenty years ago book superstores rose to prominence throughout Canada and the United States. They offered a huge selection of books, a pleasant atmosphere where you could sit and read, and most significantly, deep discounts on newly-released books, notably bestsellers.

By the end of the 1990s, as Steven Wasserman wrote in *The Nation* (18 June 2012), the chain stores “were busy expanding their empires, often opening stores adjacent to long-established community bookstores.... The chain stores could give customers deeply discounted offerings on a depth of stock made possible by favourable publishers’ terms not extended to independents.” Before the advent of the book superstores and Amazon (which adopted the same deep discount policy), new books, particularly bestsellers, provided critical revenue to independent booksellers. When independents matched these deep discounts their viability was profoundly compromised. Hundreds of independent bookstores have closed across Canada.

In 1979, with Loi 51—*la Loi sur le développement des entreprises québécoises dans le domaine du livre*—Quebec announced an innovative approach, unique in North America, which would protect and strengthen publishers, bookstores, and ultimately benefit authors. One aspect of this legislation, in addition to establishing professional standards for the book industry, was an accreditation system that ensured that Quebecers would have access to Quebec books. Quebec has resisted the disarray existing in the entire book chain outside of Quebec better than most jurisdictions in North America because of Loi 51. However, booksellers are still hurting due to deep discounting. They can no longer manage to sell bestselling books which until now helped them to keep a large stock of slower-moving books on hand. The survival of independent bookstores is crucial to our culture. They provide a diverse selection of books; bookstore events provide an opportunity for readers to connect with writers, and they advance our literary culture.



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As in other jurisdictions, Quebec book buyers—of both French- and English-language books—have become accustomed to buying new releases at greatly reduced prices whether they are purchased from the book chains, large vendors like Walmart and Costco, or independent booksellers. In the current digital environment the purchase of deeply-discounted books online is growing exponentially.

The Table interprofessionnelle du milieu du livre representing Quebec's seven large professional associations in the book industry is proposing a 'prix unique', or set price, that would apply to new books and would limit discounts for the first nine months following the date of publication. This type of regulation already exists in more than half the countries in the OECD, with the result that these countries have vast independent bookstore networks. The Association des éditeurs de langue anglaise du Québec supports this initiative. Our only concern relates to the purchase of books from large online sellers beyond Quebec's borders such as Amazon or other discount vendors. Will book buyers who expect big discounts abandon the regulated bookstore and flock to the online bookseller? The only way a 'prix unique' policy would work is if this issue can be addressed to prevent the unintended consequence of doing further harm to Quebec independent bookstores—something to be avoided at all costs.