

Copyright is my life...

Paul Whitney, president of the Canadian Library Association

When I am asked how things are going as Canadian Library Association president, my response is simply to state, 'copyright has become my life'. Admittedly, this situation had begun to manifest itself prior to my assuming exalted office, but the presidency has removed any uncertainties which may have lingered.

The blame for this sorry state of affairs rests with the Canadian Government which, despite the best lobbying efforts of the library and education sectors, passed a major revision to the *Copyright Act* in the Spring of 1997. Among other things this legislation:

- established library reprography exceptions and protections which promote the signing of a licence agreement with a collective;
- requires libraries and bookstores to purchase foreign books from Canadian distributors rather than from the country of origin; and
- may place burdensome record-keeping requirements on libraries making photocopies for users or other libraries.

Following the one-year battle over the legislation, consultations have continued on drafting a range of regulations which will delineate how the new law will be applied.

The greatest irony behind the Association's lobbying on copyright is that the government has established an agenda which focuses on the issues relevant to the 1980s. So we debate photocopying practice while content is migrating to the digital environment and we debate traditional and territorial book distribution methods while global on-line bookstores are on the ascent. Copyright issues appropriate to the present and near future are starting to emerge for debate, in large part prompted by international initiatives through the World Intellectual Property Organisation. It is clear that the stakes are getting higher for all consumers of information and there is no doubt that copyright will remain a high priority for the Canadian Library Association in the coming years.

Library associations in Canada are actively reassessing their role, operations and co-operative endeavours. The late 90s have proven to be difficult for many of our members:

- teacher-librarians are being phased out in many jurisdictions and the school library has been significantly weakened;
- independent citizen library boards as a governance model for public libraries are being dismantled in several provinces; and
- many libraries are dealing with shrinking budgets, reduced funding from senior levels of government, forced amalgamations, the undermining of free public library service.

In this environment it is essential that library associations are both efficient in their operations and effective in their lobbying activities on behalf of members for the general good of libraries. The Canadian Library Association is currently engaged in a planning process to ensure its continuing viability and relevance. This initiative will be a major focus of the Association's Council in the next six months.

Amid the upheavals and uncertainties there continue to be many encouraging signs. The societal importance of libraries has never been greater. It is our responsibility to ensure that this is recognised and that libraries are able to fulfil their potential in these interesting times. ■

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- a national library association, founded in 1946 and currently representing some 3000 institutional and personal members;
- 700 institutional members, primarily libraries and commercial members — those companies who supply goods and services to the library and information community;
- 2300 personal members including the staff and boards of public, college and university, special and school libraries, as well as employees of commercial members;
- a leader among library organisations in Canada, serving as monitor and advocate on the key political and economic issues that affect libraries and library staff. CLA advises and represents its members on issues such as copyright, taxation on books, information policy and censorship;
- a sponsor of *Library Advocacy Now!* and the Northern Exposure to Leadership Institute.