

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

DYMOCKS AND PARALLEL IMPORTATION

Dymocks, a member of the Coalition for Cheaper Books along with retail giants Big W, Kmart, Woolworths, Target and Coles, has contacted readers in their Booklover loyalty program in an effort to promote its case to the Productivity Commission. Dymocks urged Booklover members to respond to their petition supporting the lifting of parallel importation restrictions. Dymocks claims in its email that this will reduce the cost of books. Furthermore, it asserts that a lowering of book prices will not affect the rights of authors or publishers.

To be honest I'm surprised anyone (apart from the greedy retailers) is even considering parallel importing. They loosened up the rules for the music industry so that we'd get cheaper CDs and all that happened was that the importers pocketed the difference and we didn't get cheaper CDs and the local music industry has gone backwards in a big way. So no one gained anything except for a few importers. Why would anyone allow that sort of farce to occur again?

I am both an author of over 120+ books and publisher of Australian children's books.

The local publishing industry is currently being hit by rising costs, electronic technology, high discount sales, chain stores that hold monopolies, new laws in the US that demand all books for kids 12 years and under need to be lead-tested, and a plethora of other setbacks. Parallel importation of books is a burden our industry does not need. I can see quite a few problems with the proposed changes to the Copyright Act with regard to parallel importation. Let me list twelve:

- 1/ Authors receiving less remuneration from imported books. You will have by now received much evidence of this.
- 2/ Unfair competition -- obviously higher print runs can be produced at a lower price per unit, ergo, lower RRP price. Being a small press I will not be able to compete with imported titles. (Having said this, I don't believe prices will go down. Booksellers habitually put up RRP prices that have been set lower by the publishers. The bookseller alone makes this decision and keeps the full profit!) Too, the chain stores mentioned above for the most part use books as loss leaders. They use books to lure customers into their shops. Books to them are just units and they care not one iota about the adverse effects on the publishing industry that they're trying to instigate.
- 3/ The loss of cultural identity. Lose Australian publishers and we'll lose our voice.
- 4/ Remaindered books being dumped on our market. Back in the 70s British publishers bought British Commonwealth Rights from authors. They printed more than they needed to get cheaper print quotes, then dumped the surplus on our market. I suspect this still happens. It certainly will if parallel importation is allowed.

5/ Authors make little enough as it is -- take away that little bit extra and you will find fewer authors making a living from their writing. To lose even one great writer due to financial duress will be a travesty.

6/ The general reading public may not be aware of this, nor booksellers who probably welcome parallel importation, but let me tell you America's censorship laws are draconian. In education circles it's quite well known that Meredith Costain wrote a Barbie book set in Broome. She had an outdoors worker who was suntanned. The editor crossed out the word and wrote on the manuscript: sun abuse! A kid in a book of mine was sitting too close to a fire at camp. The illustrator had to re-draw the illustration. Alison Lester had a naked baby by a paddling pool so had to add a nappy; no authority figures can be denigrated; no fantasy featuring witches/superstition et al is allowed; Craig Smith had to delete the udder from a cow ... the list could take up several pages on your website. What I'm saying here is that the Americans publish pap, and our kids, who should get decent, realistic literature, aren't getting it because Australian publishers need co-editions with US publishers to make the figures work -- Australian kids are fed American censorship rules!). This is a clear example of how importation of US books will affect our trade. It's happening now. You have a precedent.

7/ New Zealand has allowed parallel importation and see how it has affected them. Why can't we learn from history? Why do we keep making mistakes that history has taught us?!

8/ I for one am fed up with importation of American culture. We lose our own identity every time a heavily promoted American product hits our shores. Our kids should be nurtured with Australian content, NOT overseas content. By now you will be aware that Australian books are heavily censored and changed to suit American culture. Why on earth do we want their version of OUR stories coming back into Australia? Try finding the word corroboree in an American published book. I doubt you'll find it. They butcher our literary heritage and what, we want to import the product?

9/ Are you aware that most books in the US are not given more than eight hours editorial time? Australian editors are still employed to edit books. Our editorial input is second to none, and remember, I say this as both an author and publisher. Let's not import inferior books. I see too many US published books riddled with spelling errors and typos. Our publishing houses are not cutting editorial staff as are the American publishers.

10/ Due to the aforementioned cutbacks, I believe overseas, especially US, product to be inferior to the home-grown product. Booksellers may well welcome the chance to make an extra buck, but dare I say it will be the chain stores that use books as loss leaders to entice people into their stores who will benefit from this folly, and not the authors and publishers, who rely on books for their livelihoods.

11/ I am sure you'll be aware that Australian authors are well represented on the International stage where major awards are concerned: The Commonwealth Prize, the IMPAC Dublin Award, Man Booker, Guardian, Orange Prize and most recently, Sonya Hartnett winning the world's largest literary prize: the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award. Do we really want to lose these treasures for the sake of the greedy few?

12/ Last but not least, most Australian authors survive on PLR and ELR remuneration. I am not sure that imported books will carry the same ISBNs, therefore will not be counted as books in the municipal/educational system. If libraries and schools were to be bought from chain stores (and many do, because they're selling locally produced books at 35% discount) then authors will no longer receive that remuneration from their books. Believe me, revising the Copyright Act re parallel importation is a catastrophe in the making.

Hopefully you will take into consideration these points when or if you are asked to vote on parallel importation. The vast majority of industry people do not want this to happen. Even the Australian Booksellers Association has now changed its vote on this issue.

Regards

Paul Collins

Author and Publisher