



PLR Report

The budget situation:

The PLR program has been affected this year by the initial phase of the federal government's program review process whereby it is seeking \$1 billion in existing programs to re-distribute to priority programs. Through this process, the PLR budget was cut by \$100,000. On the positive side, however, the Tomorrow Starts Today funding was renewed for another year. PLR is allocated \$1 million annually from this fund.

We have already indicated to the Department of Canadian Heritage that we are prepared to re-engineer the PLR program – through a sliding scale system -- in order to live within a fixed budget over a five-year period. However, the Commission decided at its December 2004 meeting that it will not institute the sliding scale system until the government allocates substantial new funding to the PLR program. The implementation of the sliding scale system would be too great a hardship for authors to endure within our existing budget, particularly in the light of possible continuing budget cuts.

Some of you were perhaps involved in the recent campaign to renew the Tomorrow Starts Today (TST) fund, out of which PLR receives \$1 million annually. It is extremely important that this fund become part of the Canada Council's base budget, and hence that of PLR, for the future. Once the dust settles on the re-allocation process the federal government is undertaking, we shall be making a request for supplementary funding in order to implement a sliding scale plan which will bring much-needed stability to the PLR program. PLR's 20th anniversary in 2005-2006 will be an opportune time for all of us to bring government awareness to the importance of adequate funding for this program.

Administrative arrangement with the Canada Council: The Public Lending Right Commission is comprised of a nineteen-member board representing national writers', library and publishers' associations. The majority of members are published professional writers. The PLR Commission is an autonomous body operating under the administrative aegis of the Canada Council for the Arts in order to benefit from administrative economies of scale. A principal tenet of the Public Lending Right Commission is to maintain a direct link to the Department of Canadian Heritage with regards to its program funding needs. By the time you receive your cheque, we will probably have signed an administrative arrangement with the Canada Council in order to clarify our relationship and to assure that new funds designated for the program are earmarked in advance by the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Library sampling changes: As mentioned in last year's letter, the PLR Commission has been encountering significant changes in the way Canada's libraries now organize and make available their holdings data. The past few years have seen the amalgamation of an increasing number of public library catalogues, either into larger metropolitan systems, or even into province-wide groupings (known as "union" catalogues).

The original philosophy of Canada's PLR program envisioned only the sampling of public libraries, since it was *public access* to Canadian books that was being paid for. However, many Canadian public libraries in the mid-80s had such modest holdings, that the Commission felt obliged to add a number of university libraries into our sampling mix. Now that sampling the holdings of increasingly large groupings of Canada's public libraries has become both technically and economically viable, we have decided we must revert to our core principle of sampling only public libraries. Due to the under-representation of poetry titles arising from the new sampling practices, and in accordance with its mandate to "give public recognition to writers for their important contribution to protecting Canada's cultural identity", the Commission is making an adjustment of one additional 'hit' for those poetry titles found in the sample.

This change in sampling procedures, along with others described below, has engendered a wide variety of results: some categories of titles have increased in prominence, others have decreased. For authors whose payment has gone down, it is important to note that we will continue our policy of annually rotating the selection of public libraries in the sample, bringing a

constantly changing combination of such libraries into the sampling process. In this way, titles not found in one year may be found in a subsequent year.

Other changes: For the first time, the sampling will include an equal number of library catalogues for French-language and English-language titles. When the program was founded in 1986, the collections of French-language libraries were discovered to be smaller and less widely distributed than their English-language counterparts. To make up for this discrepancy, only 5 French-language libraries were sampled (compared to 10 for English-language libraries) and their resulting hits doubled. This produced satisfactory results for a time, but the changing circumstances of libraries in the 1990s began to undermine the appropriateness of this formula. Since the collections of both official language groups are now deemed to be at a comparable level, the Commission's new approach is to sample 6 library systems in each of these groups.

As mentioned above, another new development in Canadian library technology has been the creation of province-wide union catalogues. Not all provinces have catalogues that are as yet accessible through automatic electronic searching, but our current list of 12 sampling libraries already contains three of them. As this capability expands, we will be able to search the holdings of more and more public libraries. Until that's possible, however – and to reflect more fairly Canada's two greatest urban densities – we will be doubling the hits of all titles found in the libraries of Toronto and Montreal, whose holdings have been found to contain the widest selection of works by authors from all over Canada. The maximum number of 'hits' for any one title is therefore 7.

As you will see from this letter, the Public Lending Right program is entering a period of dramatic adjustments. In all of its deliberations and actions on library sampling procedures, sliding scale discussions and funding requests to government, please be assured that the Commission is doing its utmost to defend and protect this vital program.