



THE WRITERS'
UNION OF CANADA

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October 13, 2010

Open Letter

RE: Concerns over the UK Public Lending Right

The Writers Union of Canada wishes to express solidarity with authors in the United Kingdom, who have mounted a vigorous protest to stop the British government from reducing funds available to the national Public Lending Right. The Union, which represents nearly 2,000 Canadian authors, strongly supports the petition – signed by 4,700 British writers – to maintain the PLR funding at its current level.

The petition, launched by the Society of Authors and supported by the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society and the Royal Society of Literature, came in response to a government spending review which asked all major arts funding bodies to show how they would manage cuts of 25 to 40 percent.

Already, without notice or consultation, the recently elected government has axed significant cultural agencies including the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, and the UK Film Council. This last employed 75 people and distributed lottery funds to over 900 films over the years, among them *Bend it Like Beckham* and *Gosford Park*.

The results of the government spending review will be announced October 20.

The British Public Lending Right, considered a model internationally, provides authors with a small payment (six pence) each time one of their books is checked out from a U.K. library. Many prominent writers added their names to the petition supporting PLR, which as the Society of Authors argues, “gives effect to a legal right and is not a subsidy.”

In *The Guardian* newspaper, crime writer Penny Grubb wrote: “With average earnings for writers so low, and with such a short shelf life for books in shops these days, PLR income for many writers is a vital part of their take-home pay.”

A robust PLR program pays writers some recompense for widespread library use of their work. It has been in place in Canada for 25 years now and it is the position of The Writers' Union of Canada that the program should be expanding, not contracting, both here and internationally. The program benefits both readers and writers.

The Canadian PLR program, which distributes \$10 million among 17,000 authors, is holdings-based, yet fashioned partly on the British model. The PLR benefits writers and readers of all ages, in all genres and available languages.

The Writers' Union of Canada is a national organization of professionally published book authors. Because a lively and diverse literary culture is essential in defining a nation, the Union supports its members and advocates on their behalf for the advancement of their common interests. In so doing we promote the rights, freedoms, and economic well-being of all writers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alan Cumyn', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Alan Cumyn
Chair