

CSSS Directions

Vol. 2. No. 1

Published by Arnold/CSSS Publishing

March 1987

WHY NOT ALBERTA?

by Margaret Barry

While Alberta was bloated from its period of energy resource highs, there were a few dissenting whispers warning against short-sighted dependence on our oil industry. The drastic decline in world petroleum prices turned those whispers to screams of outrage as Alberta's economy lost its buoyancy and sank. We learned first-hand what many economic students read about-diversification of a country's economic base helps prevent an overreliance on just one or two industries. To minimize Alberta's susceptibility to variances in national and international market conditions, other industries have to be promoted. The Economic and Regional Development Agreement (ERDA) was developed to help achieve this.

ERDA'S HISTORY

On June 8, 1984, the governments of Canada and Alberta entered into an Economic and Regional Development Agreement. ERDA was designed to encourage joint consultation and cooperation in economic development matters. Jim Horsman, Alberta's Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs, and Senator H.A. (Bud) Olson, Minister of State for Economic and Regional Development, cosigned this groundbreaking agreement.

According to government news releases. ERDA is a ten-year agreement with a number of features, such as: "an annual meeting of ministers, an annual Joint Course of Action, and instruments in the form of Memoranda of Understanding and Subsidiary Agreements. The annual meeting of ministers allows for a review of federal and provincial activities in relation to provincial priorities. The Course of Action will provide a work plan for officials, and the instruments enable more cooperative planning and programming between individual departments of the two governments."

To date ERDA, with its respective ministers, has focused on promoting: Forestry Resource Development, Tourism, Agriculture Production, Agriculture Processing, Transportation, Science and Processing, Transportation, Science and Technology, and Northern Alberta. Barbara Lacroix, a Public Affairs Communications Officer for Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs, stressed that "ERDA is an umbrella agreement. It coordinates activity, but actual funds do not come from it." More than just cheap talk, the agreement has successfully implemented programs and funding commitments. As of August 12, 1985, the total financial commitment was \$169.3 million.

ERDA's 1985 to 1986 Course of Action pin-pointed other areas that required new initiatives. Culture, it was suggested, represented "an important source of potential growth in employment and income opportunities within the province." The Course of Action summary of our cultural industry stated "a comprehensive development initiative is in order." So far this initiative has not been openly pushed, that is until now.

ALBERTA PUBLISHING

Mr. Grant Kennedy, president of Lone Pine Publishing, is determined in his effort to see culture added to ERDA's interests in Alberta. His involvement came about because it's so obvious. Here is a way to help the Alberta publishing industry and nothing is being done. In November 1986, Ontario signed a Cultural Agreement with the federal government for \$50 million over a five year period. Manitoba already has an Agreement. And B.C. and Nova Scotia will be signing Cultural Agreements with ERDA shortly. What Alberta urgently needs is some sort of commitment and representation from provincial officials at the highest levels."

Provincial initiative is crucial. Many people feel that instead of retreating and talking about government cutbacks, affirmative action should be taken to put people back to work. The potential of Alberta's publishing industry is tremendous. In just over a decade we have leapt from having five publishing houses (Canadian Social Sciences Services Ltd., Hurtig, LaBel, Tree Frog, University of Alberta Press) to having twenty-five. Mr. Kennedy feels "it's time to recognize Alberta's \$10 million gross annual revenue from publishing as an incredible potential for development." Thousands of Albertans are employed as a direct and indirect result of publishing activity.

Mr. Kennedy stated that if Alberta were to get a commitment of \$30 to \$40 million over a five year period, our young but growing industry would be in a better position to compete nationally and internationally. "We are not asking for a gift. This program would generate the economy by producing a market for our own people. In order to produce a new job in the publishing industry, \$20,000 in capital is required. That's vastly less than it takes to generate a job in petroleum or other high-tech industries."

Mr. Kennedy has written a proposal that details the range of possibilities if Alberta had an ERDA Cultural Agreement.

POSSIBLE PROGRAMS UNDER AN ERDA CULTURAL AGREEMENT - ALBERTA

Book Publishing

1. Educational Publishing:

Learning Resources Development Fund - to support the development by Alberta publishers of learning resource material for Alberta and the prairie provinces in particular.

Educational publishing is the foundation on which a successful publishing industry is based. Little educational publishing is done in Alberta now. The Department of Education would have to be actively involved. (Ontario has a \$2 million per year fund that makes

competition from publishing houses outside of Ontario difficult.) Phyllis Arnold, president of Arnold/CSSS, noted, "As a small educational publishing company in Western Canada, we have to compete with American publishing companies with branch plants in Canada, as well as the huge Canadian-owned publishing companies in Ontario. We are being put at an added disadvantage because Ontario's educational publishers have the extra benefit of ERDA's financial support."

2. Industry Support Grants:

To supercede portions of the present Department of Communications publishers' sales incentive grants. The majority now goes to Ontario.

3. Training:

For people wanting to enter book or periodical publishing as a career. For example it could: support individual attendance at Banff Publishing Workshops and other professional development courses; provide in-house subsidies that serve as part salary support while training with an individual Alberta publishing house in editing and design, or other areas of production; include development of a Canadian Publishers Institute at the University of Alberta to provide instruction, research and development and some production capacity, such as digital colour separations that would serve the publishing community.

4. A Technical Improvement Program:

Primarily in the field of aids to technological development, hardware, software, computer networks and computer training for book and periodical publishers, and possibly for writers and booksellers.

5. Distribution and Marketing Development:

Funding to encourage joint initiatives among Alberta publishers and with publishers in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. May include joint warehousing, catalogues, and sales forces. May promote foreign sales initiatives, including attendance at rights markets in Frankfurt, London, and Bologna, and at American Booksellers Annual Meetings.

6. A Marketing Support Program:

Possibly a books for Everybody"-type publication with support for hardware, mailing list compilation and cooperative advertising. (Editor's Note: "Books for Everybody" is a Christmas catalogue that lists and describes new titles. It is put together by the Association of Canadian Publishers, the Canadian Book Association, and by the Canadian Book and Periodical Development Council, with support from the Canada Council. The catalogue is sold to bookstores for five cents apiece. We could do the same for Alberta titles.)

7. Industry-Government Co-publishing:

To encourage co-publishing with Alberta government departments. For example, Tourism, Historic Sites, and Fish and Wildlife all have publications and plans that would be enhanced by effective distribution and outside professional input.

8. Guaranteed Loans:

To create a \$3 to \$4 million contingent liability fund over five years, so that the program

could fund higher risk but culturally worthy ventures, and educational publishing.

9. "Buy Alberta Books" Program:

To support an awareness of Alberta writers and books through publications, TV and radio ads, and advertising programs-with the cooperation of publishers. Support for book fairs and other promotional events (mostly within Alberta).

10. Alberta Book Collections:

To provide libraries and departments of Canadian studies with a list of Alberta books and periodicals from which they could choose titles to a specified dollar amount. (A similar program has been very successful in Manitoba for both recipients and publishers.)

11. Histories:

To encourage the development, publishing, and sales of local and regional histories. (Could increase grants already given by Historic Resources).

12. Alberta Image Bank:

Probably in cooperation with proposed Canadian Publishers Institute. Would include government and other collections in electronics so they could be called up on computer screens and used as is, or as needs basis for altered art or photography. Of great value to both book and periodical publishers, and especially for educational publishing.

13. Archival Development:

Primarily computer indexing of archival materials so that they could be readily accessed by book and periodical publishers, as well as libraries and researchers, i.e. creation of an Alberta data base. This might be built onto the base created for *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.

14. Economic Studies:

Specific to the book and periodical publishing industries, but also related to writers and booksellers. Useful to provide answers and information where it does not currently exist.

Periodical Publishing

Periodical publishing in Alberta, particularly in culturally related fields, has not been a success story. A great deal of research and development needs to be done in this field if our periodicals are not to be dominated by American and Ontario material. Since the organization base is not even in place, much of the following material is conjectural, but support and encouragement is vitally needed.

Many of the book publishing development programs listed above would (or could) include magazine components. For example items: 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, and 14.

1. Industry Support Grants:

To parallel those for the book publishing industry.

2. Cooperation in advertising sales:

Many magazines need a Toronto advertising agent since most of the national advertising comes from there. Maintaining an agent can be costly.

3. Joint Marketing Program:

To encourage cooperative programs designed to increase subscriptions and circulation.

Booksellers

1. Technological Development:

The success of the national Telebook computer ordering network is vital to Alberta writers and publishers. For it to be successful, every possible bookseller in Alberta should have access to the network and have the necessary computer equipment. Contributory funding will be needed for a portion of both the capital and operating costs. After five years the network should have reached economic self-sufficiency. Booksellers should also have access to the programs described in 3, 4, 9, 10, and 14.

Writers' Development

1. Educational Programs:

Writers workshops for trade and educational writers, including courses at Banff, correspondence courses and other services.

2. Writers' Grants.

3. Writers' Competitions.

4. Assistance to writers' organizations.

5. Assistance to programs such as writers-in-residence, conferences, readings, and travel.

GETTING A PIECE OF THE PIE

If Alberta's publishing industry is to be promoted by ERDA, the initiative must first come from Alberta. Plainly the federal government cannot be responsible for this province's inaction. A lobby movement must reach the highest office. ERDA would not only assist Alberta publishing, but it would help performing arts, museums, and Historic Sites projects. If we are to get ERDA's assistance for culture in Alberta, says Mr. Kennedy, "Alberta's premier has to get involved. That's the hard truth."