

# Intellectual Freedom Committee Annual Report: 2010-2011

By Jon Scop.

## Addressing Issues of Intellectual Freedom

In late 2009, Citizenship and Immigration Canada released the first edition of *Discover Canada: The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship*, its new study guide for prospective citizens. While the guide outlined most major points contained in Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, there was no mention of the Charter's express prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation, nor to Canada's legalization of same-sex marriage. Internal documents showed that CIC ordered the removal of such references, despite attempts by departmental senior staff members to reinsert the material. In March, 2010, the IFC authored a letter, sent on behalf of BCLA, to Minister for Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism Jason Kenney, urging him to take immediate steps to correct this censorship in any future editions of the guide.

At the meeting of the G20 in Toronto in June, 2010, opportunities for people to express themselves in the streets surrounding the conference were severely curtailed, and resulted in over 1,000 arrests, the largest mass arrest in Canadian history. Many of the arrests were of journalists, in effect preventing meaningful press coverage of the events. The vast majority of those arrested were later released with no charges. Prior to the meeting, the Ontario legislature had invoked a special wartime statute to justify widespread surveillance and preemptive detention. In the following month, the IFC authored a letter, sent on behalf of BCLA, to Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty, requesting an independent public inquiry into the matter. The letter received national attention, and prompted a response from Premier McGuinty.

Many library systems are adopting Bibliocommons as their primary catalogues. Among Bibliocommons many features is a "notice" option, in which patrons may flag library items for "coarse language," "graphic violence" or "sexual content." The IFC believes that this feature encourages the labeling of items, exalts these three factors over other objections patrons may have, and is completely unnecessary given the open-ended "comments" feature of the catalogue. The IFC authored a letter on behalf of BCLA to the BC Library Co-op urging it to work with Bibliocommons to remove this feature from Bibliocommons in BC.

## 2010 BC Library Conference

The IFC sponsored three sessions at the annual conference in Penticton: "Free Speech and the Olympics: What Happened," which was a follow-up to our November salon with David Eby and Chris Shaw, "Literacies and Issues of Intellectual Freedom in the Digital Age," and the ever-popular "Ain't on the Globe & Mail Bestseller List."

## 2011 Freedom to Read Week

Libraries throughout BC celebrated Freedom to Read Week in late February with creative displays and programs highlighting challenged materials. These ranged from interactive exhibits asking patrons to check challenged books they'd read, to inviting patrons to design their own posters celebrating intellectual freedom.

*Jon Scop is the Chair of the  
Intellectual Freedom Committee.*