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SPEAKING NOTES – BILL 12 GENERAL MEETINGS BCTF PLAN OF RESPONSE

Colleagues, together we stand today united in opposition to another imposed government decree of zero, zero, and nothing on working and learning conditions. Together we must defeat this government's longstanding agenda to silence the voice of teachers and extinguish our collective bargaining rights.

Teachers have once again played by the rules, the rules created by this very government, and yet again this government has changed the rules and imposed terms on us that will not address any problems, but only create more. Let's remember BCPSEA and this government's lack of respect for the law:

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- when we bargained agreements with school boards and governments, they stripped them of learning conditions
- when we overturned the stripping arbitrator's decision they legislated the strips, overturning a court decision
- when we won the right to speak out on educational issues, they threatened to legislate it away and appealed to court
- when we won the right to grieve School Act class sizes, they appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada and lost
- when international bodies condemn their legislation they ignore them

Two prominent newspaper columnists have called it right:

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Globe and Mail, Rod Mickelburgh"

- "The BC government moved yesterday to impose a new contract on the province's 42,000 public school teachers, **without a picket line in sight**. Although threatened rotating strikes by teachers are still a week away, Labour Minister Mike deJong told the legislature in Victoria that there is no chance of the parties reaching a negotiated settlement before then...The extent of classroom disruption is restricted by previous Liberal legislation making education an essential service...

Still the government has prevented teachers from taking even the limited action allowed under the Liberals' essential services rules."

Vancouver Sun - Vaughn Palmer, speaking of the irony of the introduction of Jinny Sims in the House moments

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before the legislation was tabled,

"The hammer, Bill 12, was sitting on the desk of Labour Minister Mike de Jong as he and his colleagues extended a "warm welcome" to the union leaders. We who are about to squash you, salute you....."

This government is pretending that they have nothing to do with this, that they are neutrals. Nonsense. They are the reason that our learning conditions have deteriorated, they are the reason that teachers are frustrated and angry, they are the reason that we have not been able to negotiate a collective agreement that meets the needs of students and teachers.

This government, while we were engaged in the Connolly process, in good faith, trying to reach an agreement with government, was buying ad space in the Vancouver Sun for

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full page ads on Tuesday, October 04, 2005. Those ads aren't placed overnight. They are planned well in advance. Why isn't the money that is being spent by this government on trying to convince the public that everything's fine in schools being put into learning conditions and our salary, into a negotiated settlement? That would solve the problem! Why is it okay for tax breaks for the corporations at the same time teachers and students are told there's no money for you?

The problem here is not structures – the problem has always been the government's policies of zero, zero, and won't talk about it. The problem has been that no matter who is across the table from us, they are bound and gagged by government mandates that prevent any discussions

⁶ about learning conditions and a fair and reasonable salary increase.

We cannot and must not accept this latest imposition. We learned in 2002 that one day of protest is not enough. We have seen the results of Bills 27 and 28 and the devastation to learning and working conditions, to teachers' salaries, and to our professional integrity. Indeed, what is really threatened here is public education.

Teachers have a history of showing courage and strength – in 1919, Victoria teachers were the first in what was then the British Empire to hold a strike in support of teacher salaries, long before we ever had the legal right to withdraw services. Over the decades, teachers have withdrawn services for better pensions, for class size limits, for other working people under attack, for social programs,

⁷ and for bargaining and professional rights – long before we

ever had full bargaining rights. Today, we are at another juncture in our history when we will stand up again. We have unprecedented support – from our teacher colleagues across this country and the world, who have been sending messages of support; from the rest of the labour movement both provincially and nationally; from thousands of retired teachers who want to ensure that what they fought for and gained will be protected; and from parents and students who know first hand what's at stake. Judging from the phone calls and e-mails to our building, we have incredible general public support. We have taken action and provided financial support to many around that world and that support is being returned. One part of our action plan that is as essential as

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withdrawing our services is the continued building of that support. We must reach out to those who are aligned with us in our defence of public education. We are recommending that every teacher in this province hold “Open Houses” with parents on Thursday, October 6, 2005, so that parents understand why we must take the actions we are voting upon today, so that parents can have the information and the tools to put pressure upon this government, and so that the expensive government ads are not the only message parents hear.

In addition we are recommending a number of outreach actions that continue to build pressure on this government to sit down and resolve these issues with teachers. Please note the rally being planned for October 17 in Victoria and in large centres around this province. Every one of us

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needs to be there, to say to this government that teachers

and the public are united in opposition to yet another imposition that does nothing to resolve the real needs of students and teachers. Local labour councils are organizing rallies in our communities. Yours is ----- It is critical that every one of us shows up and stands side by side with the rest of labour, with parents, with students, with those trustees who have spoken out and with other supporters in our communities.

The other silent partner in most communities has been the school boards – where are they? They are the elected officials charged with the protection and defence of public education. We must show up at every school board meeting and demand to be heard. We must insist that school boards speak up and do their job. They must say to BCPSEA and

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to government, “Sit down with teachers and resolve these issues now.” They must say to parents, “We stand with our teachers in their need to sit down and negotiate an agreement that meets the needs of teachers and students.” Otherwise, they must be removed from office in the upcoming civic elections.

Your Executive Committee is recommending that we withdraw services beginning on Friday, October 7, 2005 with a clear plan with clear goals so that we achieve what teachers around this province have repeatedly said they must have: a negotiated resolution of working and learning conditions and a fair and reasonable salary increase. We must insist that this government repeal Bill 12 and sit down with us and resolve the issues. Anything less than that is the end of our collective bargaining, the end of our voice in

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determining the conditions in our schools, the end of our

profession as we know it.

We did not take this recommended action lightly. We are not pretending that this will be easy. Each and every one of you must go into this knowing the consequences, both of taking this action and of not taking it. We have prepared information on the possible consequences of our recommended action plan and will share that with you before you vote. But our history has been rich with political protest and when we stand together, when we remain united, we succeed – united we stand and divided we fall. This is one of those moments. In 1987, when teachers went out around this province in opposition to Bills 19 and 20, the BCTF was charged with seditious conspiracy and nothing ever came of those charges because

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we were united and we had public support. We have clear policies on support for any member who is victimized as a result of our collective actions. The Executive Committee has also decided to pay the equivalent of strike pay to our members during this protest.

I am confident that teachers around this province will overwhelmingly support this plan, that teachers will once again take a stand for our students, ourselves, our profession, and for fairness and justice. A “Yes” vote means we will continue our fight for public education, a “No” vote means we accept another imposition, we accept the end of our collective bargaining rights, and we accept 0, 0 and nothing on learning and working conditions. I urge you to vote Yes. It’s the only choice that will lead us to a better future.

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