

Teacher

Special Election Issue

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A legacy that must change

By Glen Hansman

May 30, 1966, *The Vancouver Sun* carried a one-page feature that boldly proclaimed "Education taking new turns in a world of change: Emphasis for youth must be on how to think." The article describes the computer as the pacesetter in what has become an "age of rapid technological and social change." Anxiety about this rapid change is the rationale provided for much of what follows in the article. It is up to the education system to "prepare people to cope with the economic, social, and psychological problems mushrooming around them."

The conclusion is that BC must make a "complete break with traditional education and its rigid conception of organization, curriculum, timetabling, and teaching methods." Education must now be "available at various times and institutions offering varied programs." The standard school calendar and schedule are things of the past, and "[t]raditional emphasis on teaching facts must give way to stimulating thinking." Why? Because in an era of where there is an "explosion of knowledge," the curriculum must shift away from "teachers supplying students with factual knowledge to students discovering the knowledge for themselves." This change in curriculum is mirrored by a swing away from "textbooks and teacher lectures to [the] use of a wide variety of communications media and teaching techniques." The article itself is accompanied by a photograph depicting the new technological marvel in education—the overhead projector. Trades and technology programs are cited, as is the need for

continuous education throughout a person's lifetime given the likelihood that most working adults will need to be retrained several times.

Printed on the same page (no coincidence, surely!) is a paid advertisement from what was then called the Department of Education, proudly proclaiming that "British Columbia leads in the improvement and expansion of educational opportunities?" The Sacred Minister of Education Hon L.R. Peterson, is shown in a photograph above text that highlights the government's record on education: "The facts speak for themselves: the educational level of British Columbia's population is the highest in Canada and nowhere are the educational opportunities greater." In fact, "Thirty-one percent of the total provincial revenue for this fiscal year will be devoted to further improvement and expansion in this important field of human betterment."

If much of the above language seems familiar, you're not imagining things. Other than the 31% figure, much of what is proclaimed as bold, new, and necessary in the 1966 *Vancouver Sun* article is eerily similar to what is proclaimed as bold, new, and necessary in the BC Education Plan. The themes and anxious language are nearly identical.

Some of the themes and language have been repackaged with newer monikers we're all familiar with: personalization, personalized learning,

educational transformation, 21st Century Learning, etc. Some aren't as new. The "flexibility and choice" mantra of the BC Liberal government has been at play since at least the *Public Education Flexibility & Choice Act*, rushed through by Christy Clark as minister of education in 2002 and declared unconstitutional by the BC Supreme Court in 2011. The phrase continues to be used by the ministry and is sprinkled throughout the BC Education Plan. Teachers' experience has shown that "flexibility and choice" is simply code for cutting teaching jobs and services to kids, closing schools, and shifting more public funds to independent schools and other private interests. Corporate and business involvement in pushing for change in public education isn't new either—but as others have pointed out in recent issues of *Teacher* newsmagazine, corporate and business involvement in BC's education system perhaps hasn't been quite as overt until recent times. Public education in BC is being offered up as something ripe for the picking for Pearson, Cisco, IBM, Apple, Dell, Microsoft, and others—not just those affiliated with the Global Education Leaders' Program, Canadians for 21st Century Learning & Innovation, Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and the Premier's Technology Council.

Yes, there have been several attempts at education change since the 1960s, and things certainly haven't been at a standstill. BC teachers have weathered enough change to be extremely suspicious about education fads—and especially about government-led education change.

The concessions brought by government to the provincial bargaining table in the last round were brought in the name of the BC Education Plan, and were clumsily written, had no funding or other resources to support them, would have had extremely negative effects on teachers' work lives and professional practice. It appears that the reason why the concessions were brought to the table, and remained on the table so long, was not to solve any real issue in schools but rather for



President's message

Susan Lambert

You will be receiving this special edition of the *Teacher* prior to the writ being dropped. In this intensely politicized period it is important to note that while the BCTF takes very important and very political positions, we are non-partisan.

We take our political opinions to every major political party and we advocate in every venue. Our advocacy right now is for a government that publicly commits to reversing the harms done to public education and the working lives of teachers this past decade. We have worked very hard to stem the tidal wave of government policy—the accountability agenda that brought us the Fraser Institute rankings, the legislative vandalism that stripped our collective agreements of class-size, composition, and staffing ratios, the chronic underfunding, and the relentless disrespect and de-valuing of teachers

and teaching. We've asked the Liberals to reverse their own policies at face-to-face meetings, on the streets, and in the courts.

In this election we need to continue this advocacy and strongly press all candidates and all parties, but particularly the hopeful NDP and the governing Liberals. We need to be reassured that funding will be restored and then improved. The decade of cuts has robbed the system of over \$300 million annually, cumulatively \$3.3 billion and counting. We are now 6,600 teachers short of the national average student-educator ratio. The current

flat-line budget, which doesn't account for the 4% MSP premium increase, the 1.3% pension increase, and any other inflationary pressures, leaves the system to stagger along on the backs of teachers yet again. We need a new government that will state publicly its intention of reallocating priorities to restore funding to the public system. We know the wrong cannot be righted in one year. Nevertheless we need a commitment to re-build the capacity over time. Starting immediately.

We need a government committed to respecting our full bargaining rights. Such a government must stop wasting public dollars on the continuing court case and meet us at the table with resources to ensure a successful round of bargaining. We need to be able to bargain improved working conditions, the restoration of reasonable class-size and composition limits, and staffing ratios. We need better working conditions in schools because teachers' working conditions are students' learning conditions. With two years of

zero salary increase, we are no longer competitive in relation to private sector comparable positions or our colleagues across the country. A new government must commit to a fair salary increase for teachers.

We need to watch all the campaigns in this electoral period carefully. We need to be alert for concrete and specific proposals for funding in particular. We are told the cupboard is bare and our expectations have to be tempered for the times. A child who entered school in 2002 will graduate next year having experienced year after year of successive cuts. Efforts of teachers to maintain the quality of public education in BC have been Herculean. Now we need a government and a political party equally heroic that will commit to funding what is probably the most important public service of all, the building block of our democracy—high quality, free, and universally accessible public education. ■



OPINION

Online gift to the Liberals

I don't know who decided to make certain *Teacher* magazine editions online only, but I think it is a terrible mistake and it is a total gift to this anti-education Liberal government, these barefaced dismantlers of public education.

Do an online *Teacher* if you must, but the BCTF still needs to put print versions of every edition in every staffroom, because most teachers are just too dead tired to go home and access the magazine online. What teacher wants to sit alone after an exhausting day and flip through more computer screens? If teachers don't see a print edition of *Teacher* in the staffroom, it won't even occur to them to read the articles and discuss them with their colleagues. The BCTF will have wasted all the energy, intellect, and money that it took to put together the online-only *Teacher*, because people won't even read it. They will miss excellent articles that they need to read so that they can unite against the privatizers. Fortunately, Ryan Cho's fine article on privatization and privilege in the March issue was in the print edition; it was a great article and I urge all teachers to read it. However, your May/June edition is online only. Don't we have an election coming up in May? Don't you want teachers to know all the issues? So why are you burying the May/June edition online—another gift to the Liberals?

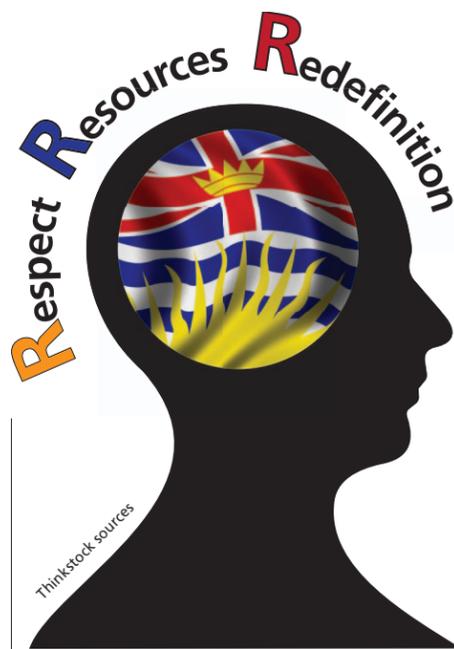
C'mon BCTF, stop making these gifts to the enemies of public education. Reduce

the print run if you must, but at least deliver some print versions of *Teacher*—one for every two members to every staffroom every month. That way you still save paper, but teachers can read the same articles, discuss them together and recommend them to other members. You will strengthen the solidarity of your union and give teachers a solid unifying voice that they can count on to appear in their staffroom every month.

By the way, you should have run the following as a pull-quote in the Cho article: "While the percentage of BC GDP spent on public education fell from 19.67% to 15.14% over the last 10 years, the BC economy grew by about 4.8% between 2006 and 2009." That's the kind of information that the public school teachers of BC need to know. They know immediately how much they have been devalued and cast aside and they will be motivated to make a change come next election.

The BCTF needs to stop playing into the hands of the enemy and go back to print versions of every *Teacher* edition. It irks me that this letter, which I spent time and thought to write, could be buried in an online edition and lost to much of the membership. If it is buried in an online edition, then I request that you reprint it in the August edition. I don't want my ideas buried online and neither does anyone else. Bring back print editions for every issue in every staffroom! ■

Louise MacMaster
Surrey



Three Rs for this provincial election

By Peter Thomson

From my retired-teacher perspective, I think today's teachers need three new Rs for public education: Respect—Resources—Redefinition. So, when evaluating candidates and their parties I suggest that voters look for these signs of educational literacy.

1. Does the candidate and her or his party respect teachers and their union and their right to full collective bargaining? Eleven years ago, the BC Liberal government stripped class-size and composition provisions from the teachers' collective agreement, an action that was recently declared unconstitutional by the courts. It's easy to respect ones' favourite teacher—we all do, but our favourite teacher wants respect for their union rights too.
2. Does the candidate and her or his party commit to providing the resources teachers need to do their job? Our schools are short hundreds of teacher-librarians, resource teachers, and counselors. Many of our schools are in disadvantaged communities where poverty sees many children undernourished. These schools need extra help or we'll lose those kids. The provincial program that, almost miraculously turned my learning disabled grandson's school life around, finds itself closing its doors due to funding cuts. After it closes, the children who are no longer being helped will struggle in frustration at school and many will give up. We'll lose those kids without resources now.
3. Will the candidate and her or his party redefine the role of public education so it regains its central importance in our democracy? The present grade-wide, province-wide FSA tests are a symptom of a system taken over by those who wish to measure a school like we measure a factory's output. Our schools must, of course, teach literacy and numeracy, but most importantly they must nurture young citizens. Does your candidate and their party get that?

Peter Thomson is a retired Surrey teacher.

Teacher



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A legacy from page 1

the government to leverage the “bad teacher” narrative as a PR move to deflect accusations that they are doing nothing to address class size, class composition, special education, and funding issues properly.

Using FSAs as a political tool has been reconfirmed in the internal BC Liberal document that was leaked in late February 2013; it outlined how party insiders and government staff would align their efforts and use government resources to win over ethnic voters. In addition to cynical “quick wins” like apologizing for past wrongs, the memo cites the NDP’s promise to eliminate the FSA as something that might be “unpopular in ethnic communities” and therefore something that could be used as a wedge issue. There is little attempt made at this point for anyone at the provincial level to maintain the pretence that there are educational motivations behind the FSA. Political choices matter more.

Education funding is another political choice. The government plans to keep the public education budget frozen for another three years and BC schools will get no relief from chronic underfunding. Once again, block funding for public education will be flat at \$4.7 billion even as costs rise significantly across the system. With increasing costs for school districts, a flat line in block funding means further cuts in school districts across BC in the weeks ahead.

We need to move BC back up to the national average in terms of education funding. According to Statistics Canada, BC is last on seven key education funding measures including the following:

- BC has the lowest per-student funding in Canada—almost \$1,000 per student below the national average.
- BC has the worst student-educator ratio in Canada. This means there are more students per teacher than anywhere else in the country.
- While public school enrolment declined across Canada, only BC cut teaching positions. All other provinces hired more teachers and invested more in public education.

Since last spring, the BC Liberal government has been touting its Learning Improvement Fund (LIF), which is supposed to provide additional services to students with special needs. This year’s budget document, which is essentially a re-announcement of the LIF, states that the fund has been used to hire 500 more teachers, but the BCTF has seen no corresponding increase in the teaching force.

The fund is no substitute

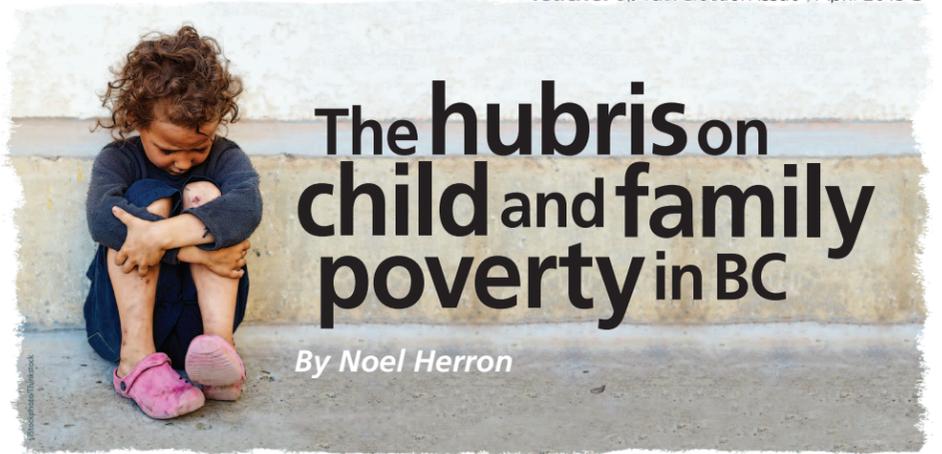
for the guaranteed support levels that were taken away by unconstitutional legislation in 2002. Children who began Kindergarten that year now have gone through their entire school careers in larger classes, with less support for special needs, and with fewer counsellors, librarians, and other specialist teachers to help them along the way. Despite all the government hype about education reform, there is no money in the budget for any new initiatives, such as much-needed enhancements to Aboriginal education, or trades and technology in schools. The flat-lined budget also fails to acknowledge that teachers are currently in negotiations for a new collective agreement.

At the bargaining table, we’re looking for a fair deal for teachers and better support for kids. Teachers have won their rights once again to bargain class size and class composition, and government needs to be prepared to deal with these issues at the table, and bring the resources necessary to do so. The huge gap between BC teachers’ salaries and other teachers in the rest of Canada, is also something that must be addressed. Teachers understand that problems are not going to be solved over night, but there needs to be a meaningful plan to restore services and resolve the many outstanding issues.

Not everything is solved by an election. Whoever forms government in May will have a lot to deal with—on the revenue and on the expenditure side of the government ledger. But in the lead-up to the election, as well as post-election, the BCTF will be continuing to share the teachers’ plan for public education—our Better Schools For BC platform, which is available in hardcopy and in an interactive online format at www.betterschoolsbc.ca

There must be a change in government. Last spring, BC teachers voted to organize local-by-local to work for a change in government, and though the past few years have been trying and tiring, we are motivated. It is clear that restoring services and resolving so many issues is not going to occur under a BC Liberal government. The worst per-student education funding, worst student-educator ratio, dismal record on child poverty, unconstitutional legislation removing class-size and class-composition provisions, accelerated privatization and corporatization of public education and other public services, continued legislative attacks on teachers, and erosion of public education and public services as a whole in the province—this is not a legacy that should be allowed to continue. ■

Glen Hansman, BCTF second vice-president



The hubris on child and family poverty in BC

By Noel Herron

It takes a special kind of arrogance, after leading the country in child poverty for eight years, to turn around in a matter of months and proclaim that British Columbia is now actually outpacing the rest of the country in poverty-reduction programs when all of the available evidence points to the contrary.

This was the position taken by the former BC Minister of Children and Family Development (MCFD) Mary McNeil, who before stepping down a few months ago, handed over the reins to an equally tone-deaf Stephanie Cadieux, the latest candidate in an astounding revolving door of eight MCFD ministers since 2001, when the governing Liberals came to power.

Facing the possibility of electoral defeat in the upcoming May 14 provincial election, the BC Liberals last spring hurriedly produced what they termed a viable poverty reduction plan “to be piloted in seven BC communities.”

Appearing before a skeptical audience of seasoned poverty activists at a regular First Call (the BC umbrella, advocacy organization representing 90 organizations and groups) meeting in Vancouver, the MCFD deputy minister proceeded to outline a vague, locally-developed, “pilot” plan with a so-called “personalized” poverty approach.

But First Call advocates weren’t buying any of it.

The province’s leading advocacy organization slammed the provincial strategy and accused the current minister of “cherry picking” statistics in defence of a flawed plan.

And while BC Premier Christy Clark continues to laud her Families-First agenda and tout her controversial BC Jobs Plan as the key solution, (with saturation, pre-election advertising, costing taxpayers \$15 million), the disconnect between the public and the province on child and family poverty seems to have widened. Clark’s lack of support among women voters is clearly a source of concern for the Liberals.

For over a year, the governing party has been trailing the opposition NDP in polls by a wide margin, but some commentators estimate the race will tighten as the election nears.

Of particular concern to the Liberals must have been December’s eloquent clarion call for action from 31 of BC’s faith-based leaders, who pointedly noted that “more than half-a-million British Columbians lived in poverty in 2010,” the last time official Statistics Canada figures were available, and

“that within Canada, BC has the largest gap between rich and poor.”

Now, with the May 2013 election fast approaching, one can expect the BC Liberals to boast about their “personalized” plan which, incidentally, carries no funding, lacks clear goals, and timelines, and won’t kick in until 2014.

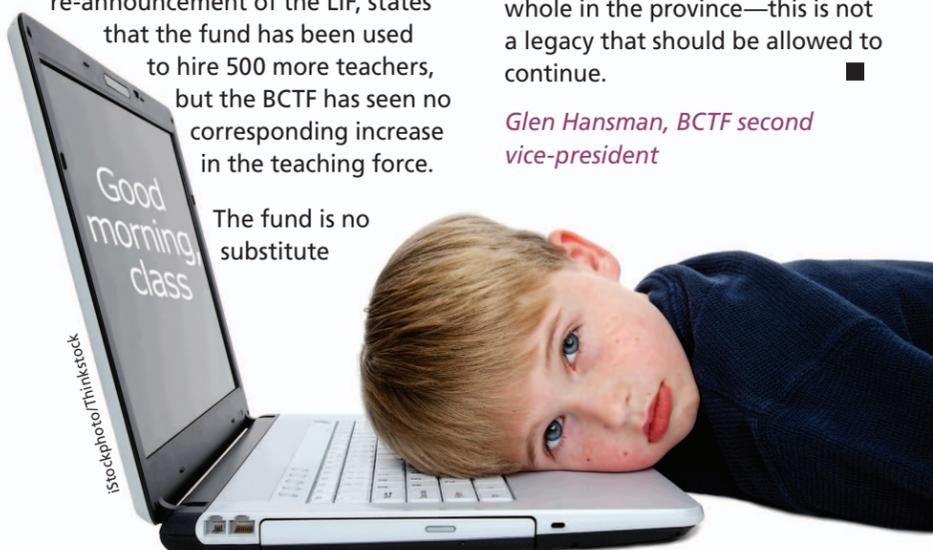
Over the past two years, the governing party has remained mostly silent in the face of an onslaught of negative stories on social issues, particularly on the ravages of child and family poverty, as reported in the media.

Hardly a month goes by without detailed stories or meetings on a host of issues: disadvantaged families struggling to cope with high unemployment; stretched inner-city schools with collapsing breakfast programs; hungry kids with poor clothing and spasmodic school attendance; young caregivers, as young as 12, looking after ailing family members, without assistance; the forcing of adults with developmental disabilities to leave group homes for cheaper accommodations (a situation, later reversed, amid widespread uproar); increased pressure on local food banks; and several shocking cases of child neglect, mishandled by the MCFD, as documented by the province’s independent representative for children and youth.

BC Liberals must now realize that the sharp contrast between more than a decade of intense focus on high-profile infrastructure projects, sporting events and edifices, with their indifference and neglect toward unaddressed and prolonged hardships would eventually come back to haunt them.

But then, when you are a dozen years in power, facing an imminent election, you start believing your own spin, despite the urgency of the situation, it appears that unalloyed hubris knows no bounds in British Columbia. ■

Noel Herron is a former inner-city school principal and school trustee and author of “Every Kid Counts,” a history of inner-city schools in Vancouver.



The leaders speak out:

istockphoto/Thinkstock

1 Teachers are feeling battered after a decade of cutbacks and restrictions on bargaining rights. What can you offer that would restore some hope of improvement?

2 Are you prepared to restore full, free, collective bargaining rights?

Conservative



John Cummins

I think that the reality is that, here in British Columbia, there is a crying need for people with the skills necessary to obtain the educational resources, if you will, necessary to lead productive lives and of course it starts right at the beginning, it starts in elementary schools, secondary schools, and then there has to be obviously the post-secondary institutions that are ready to help prepare these people to lead productive lives. We see now in British Columbia that that is simply not the case. We are having to bring people into this province to perform jobs that British Columbians are more than capable of performing but we don't have the skilled people necessary, and I think

that's a reflection on governments' commitment to financing adequately the education system and I don't think that can continue. Teachers are obviously valuable members of our community, they're the frontline when it comes to providing those educational services, and I think that government has to ensure that teachers are going to work each day with a positive frame of mind, which I know that they do, but without that lingering doubt that their value and worth is recognized by government and the public at large.

Well, what I think we need to do—well it would be easy to say yes to that—but I think what we need to do is restore a positive relationship between teachers and bargaining agents and build a trust between the two. I would just hate to think that to solve these issues we have to go to strike, it certainly is negative and I'm sure that most teachers would feel the same way that that's the last thing they want to see. I would rather see us at this point try to resolve our issues without having to resort to a strike; I think it's counterproductive and it doesn't do any one any good, whether it's the students or the teachers.

Green



Jane Sterk

A very big question. The Green Party supports collective bargaining rights. And we believe that there needs to be a change in the way we approach collective bargaining so that it's not likely, or less likely that the government will intervene and impose a settlement on teachers. We think that there needs to be a real commitment to effective collective bargaining and without the constant threat, which I imagine contributes to the stress that teachers are feeling, that the government is simply going to legislate teachers back to work without an opportunity to come to a resolved settlement. We think that there are ways that that change in collective bargaining might be approached; the use of mediators, the use of arbitrators, the use of sides taking their best position, and an independent person deciding between the two positions. There are new and creative ways to approach collective bargaining. In terms of funding, as you know, the constant and chronic response is that there is a limited supply of money and the Green Party is cognizant of the limitation of the monies that are available for the things that we as a society value. Given that however, we think that there is a need to look at the way we're spending our money and our revenue sources. The Green Party is not adverse to new taxation as long as that taxation is fair and in the best interest of the society. We think that there are expenditures within the current budget of the province that need to be looked at and reassessed in terms of whether or not they are meeting the needs that British Columbians want. For instance

there are subsidies to the oil and gas industry that we think could be better shifted into other priorities. And we also believe that there are some potential efficiencies that could be had by looking at the bureaucracies in some of the government areas where we seem to have had an increase in the number of management and executive positions at the cost of "boots on the ground" shall we say.

We also think that one of the shifts that needs to happen is to move back to both community-based education and more localized bargaining, so that the role of the local school board is re-established as the primary bargaining agent for the teachers. I might need you to repeat the question to make sure I have fully understood the question. I think that the hope that the Green Party provides is a belief that things are not working well at the moment; that people should have the ability to feel good about their job and their employment situation. Public service, like public education, should be one of those employment places that value the people who are doing the job. In changing education, we need to have everybody who is involved in wanting a better outcome, and that includes the teachers, the school trustees, parents, and students, and the public at large should be involved in discussions in how we might improve both the working conditions of teachers and the learning conditions of students and the outcomes in public education.

I think I've answered that in the first question. We believe in a collective bargaining process that is fair and allows for the process to move to a conclusion that is done between the parties of that collective bargaining without a big stick held over it by the government. And when the collective bargaining process has run into difficulty, as has been I think the norm in bargaining with teachers, that we explore innovative ways to move out of that place of impasse into a more healthy process of coming to a fair resolution.

Liberal

Christy Clark

A number of attempts were made through the premier's press secretary and premier's office for an interview without success.

Did not respond.

NDP



Adrian Dix

Over the last 10 years, since January of 2002, when the government introduced Bill 27 and 28, we've had a very divisive situation in public education, and it's largely been driven by government that only wants to listen to its friends. There is no question that whoever wins the next election is going to inherit a very difficult challenging fiscal situation. People know what my priorities are, they're to address issues of inequality and productivity in the economy, and you do that by investing in public education from Kindergarten through post-secondary education, you ensure that young people have access to the post-secondary education they need, and you have to address issues of quality in public education. That's the first set of things that is clearly a high priority for anybody in terms of addressing the economic and social questions in modern British Columbia. In addition to that, and this is where the choices

come in, we also have to address the fact that we have the highest child-poverty rates in the country over a period of years and that has an impact. The classroom is a vital place and we have to see that as a priority, but we also have to recognize that it doesn't exist in isolation from society. We have the highest absolute rates of inequality as well. The issues that used to be issues of low-income people are often being touched on and felt by people who have middle incomes today and so these issues are a key priority for us. We have to have a plan to address poverty, poverty reduction as well as plans to address issues in the classroom. That's what we hope to present to the voters, understanding that the current governments' fiscal management is very poor and there are going to be limited resources.

Yes.

John Cummins, Adrian Dix, and Jane Sterk were all kind enough to agree to be interviewed by the BCTF. The same set of questions was asked of each without any prior preparation. The responses are recorded exactly as given with no editorializing.

By David Denyer

3 Teachers' salaries are falling further and further behind those of other provinces. What will you do about that?

4 Bills 27 and 28 stripped the collective agreement in 2002. There has been a huge loss of classroom teachers and learning specialist teachers over the last 10 years. What will you do to redress the situation?

5 Will you respect the BCTF as the voice of teachers in this province and involve the union in discussions on education change?

On the salary issue, I think that part of the problem is that the public loses a sense of where teachers stand in relation to other provinces and other professions, because too often I think in the bargaining process, the needs in the classroom are brought to the fore and the teachers, when it comes to their salary, the pay that they deserve, the jobs that they do don't get that public recognition or they're not part of the discussion. I think in that sense there has to be a separation between the legitimate wage, pensions, and benefits demands of teachers and the legitimate pedagogical concerns. I think that if we do that it could help the public become aware of any shortcomings that there may be, and it makes it easier for government to address those concerns.

I sympathize with the teachers on that because I understand the difficulties that are created in the classroom by accommodating special needs, and so on and it's marvellous its part of the job that teachers do, but I see these issues of the classroom size and these other pedagogical concerns as issues that aren't necessarily issues that need to be bargained but issues that depending on the classroom, individual classrooms, there can be differences geographically, and I think that these sort of things need to be separated out as much as possible from the bargaining process and viewed from the issue of what's best for the students, what's best in the classroom, and what's best for the teacher. I think that's the way we should be addressing these things, not sitting across a bargaining table and trying to make some determination of what we are going to apply across the board. I think there has to be input from parents, as well as teachers, and the government, and of course the ministries and the trustees, but, I see these issues as issues that need to be worked out in a collaborative way with broad input.

Absolutely, the BCTF is the recognized voice of teachers in the province, they have nominations, elections throughout the province and the district, I don't think there's any question that they are the collective voice of teachers in the province. I don't have a problem with that and I think that's the correct course to follow.

I think that the question of salaries is one that we need to look at. I'm not convinced that comparisons with other jurisdictions are necessarily the mechanism to do that analysis of what would be a fair income for teachers. I think it is only one measure of the possible ways that we look at how we compensate people. I was a teacher in 1968, so we now have that many years of pretty ineffective results of our collective bargaining process. I think that much of the reason why we have the malaise that we have now in public education, is that much of that collective bargaining is salary related, and so I don't have a good answer in terms of specifically how we would address the issue of teacher income. I think this is a bigger societal question. It relates to the differences between rich and poor, it relates to things like education for all things that relate to community—healthy communities. I think that is a bigger discussion that we're all going to have to have. And I think part of that discussion is a bigger question about what level of income is sufficient to provide for your family in such a way that you can have a good home, and have the associated things that come with a healthy life.

This is part of the bigger conversation that we have to have with the people who are invested in having a public education system that achieves the level of excellence that everyone involved wants from teachers, to parents, to school principals, vice principals, school boards, and the greater public. We all know that an educated public is critically important and will become more critically important in the future if we're looking 20 or 50 years down the road, children are going to need to be educated for a whole different skill set. A whole different flexibility in terms of how they are able to approach adulthood with sufficient skills to know that they are going to be successful. So clearly, the government of the day, the BC Liberal government, acted in a way that was contrary to respectful recognition of the rights of teachers, and we need to have a bigger societal conversation about how do we ensure that the classroom size and the composition and the resources that are there to support both the children and the teachers in that classroom are optimal. And again I am somewhat cautious of averages and specific numbers. I think that we all know that there are possibilities to use new technologies in ways of thinking about brain development and childhood development that may assist us in coming to those optimal things. We also as a party, are not a party that believes in a one-size-fits-all model. So that in some areas we might want quiet classes that are micro-sized, in other areas it might be that a larger class size would be acceptable.

I certainly think that the BCTF is an important voice for the teacher, and in my previous answers I didn't specifically include the BCTF, but they of course are a major stake-holder in terms of wanting to improve both the conduct of education and the outcomes that we have within the educational system, so we would include the BCTF in that, and would want them fully participating in how we should make change in education, whether that be in the type of curriculum we're offering or the methodologies that teachers are using, or the means of hiring and mentoring teachers. Those are all very important roles that the BCTF would play. I would just like to let teachers know that our policy is on the website at greenparty.bc.ca. Our Green Book 2013 is a full-policy document of the Green Party. We think of it as a living document so it is subject to change even before the election. There's a few areas where we're looking at new policy, not in the educational realm, but in other areas. I think teachers, like all British Columbians, are interested in the whole package and what it offers and so I would encourage your members to look at our educational policy. We have a list of principles there that we think could guide us to a better effective educational system and so those would be of interest to teachers I believe.

We're looking forward to the election and the results.

Did not respond.

Did not respond.

Did not respond.

You negotiate these things at the bargaining table. People know that I've been opposed to Bills 27 and 28 from the beginning and that many of the remnants of those are going away anyway. It's not just teachers as you know; in fact, as much as teachers have been targeted by the current government, other workers have received worse treatment. Basic employment standards in the province aren't enforced and have to be enforced by people individually, healthcare workers in many cases saw 50% reduction in their salary in the privatization of their jobs. Bill 29—brought in at the same time as Bills 27 and 28, saw the largest layoff of union workers in BC history, the time when the current premier was the deputy premier and minister of education. So, these are issues we have to address at the bargaining table, and we have to have a frank discussion of what taxpayers can move forward and what their priorities are and that's what we're going to do.

We negotiate at the bargaining table. Our belief is that the classroom is more important than it's ever been. Today 80% of the jobs of the future require post-secondary education, that's not an abstraction, in fact, what you need is a higher degree of K-12 education. Many trades and training program's today require math skills, well beyond the math skills that I required when I needed to get into the University of British Columbia when I graduated from high school in BC in 1982. This is clearly a priority and we need to work with people and understand that they don't have unlimited resources and make sure that those resources that we apply are applied best. Given the central role of the classroom today, one of the worst problems of the last 10 years, I think, is the division that has been caused by Bill 27 and 28, at the very time when classroom education is most important. There always will be hard negotiations, there's always going to be a discussion, and we should have that. It has to take place both in the context of respect for teachers but also with a respect for the fact that classroom education is more important today than ever before, there are very few people who could leave school before Grade 12 and expect economic success today. If we understand that education, in a time of technological change, is more important, then we have to treat the system, the students, the parents, the teachers, with more respect and understanding.

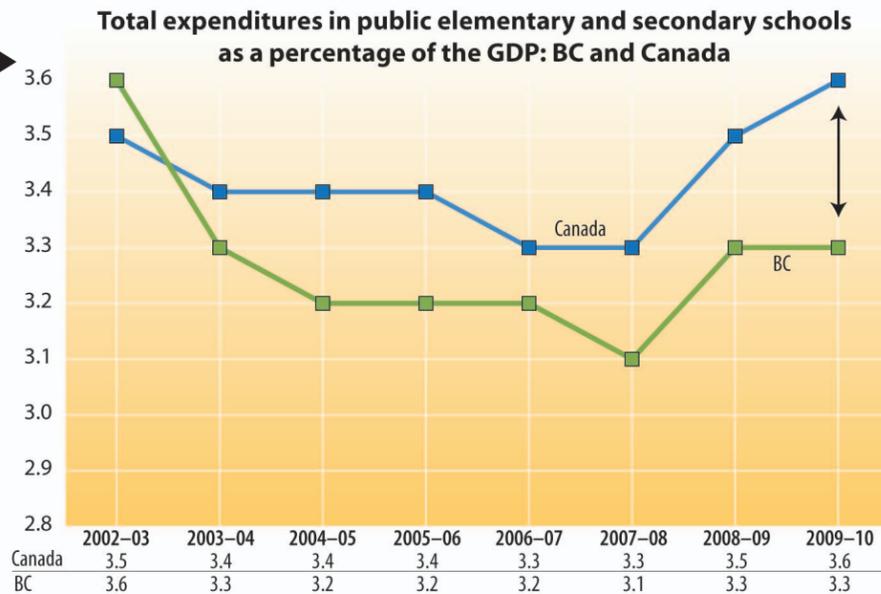
Yes.

BC—the *worst* record in Canada

Public school funding

BC falls behind in K-12 funding as a per cent of GDP

Since 2002-03, BC has fallen behind the rest of Canada on its commitment to funding public education. In 2002-03, British Columbia spent 3.6% of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on BC public schools, higher than Canada as a whole. But after 2002-03, British Columbia quickly fell behind the rest of the country, reducing K-12 funding to 3.3% of GDP. By 2009-10, BC ranked second-lowest among the provinces in K-12 funding as a percentage of GDP.



Sources: Statistics Canada (2010), *Summary of Public School Indicators for the Provinces and Territories, 2002/2003 to 2008/2009*, p. 37, and Statistics Canada (2011), *Summary of Public School Indicators for the Provinces and Territories, 2005/2006 to 2009/2010*, p. 46.

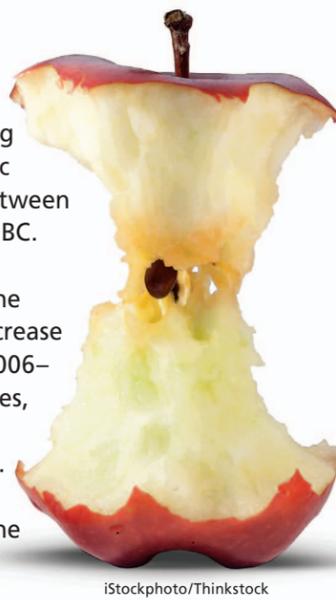
BC falls further behind Canada in per-student funding

In 2007-08, per-student funding (operating expenditures—current dollars) in BC was \$73 above the national average (Canada). By 2010-11, per-student funding in BC was \$988 below the national average (Canada).

BC ranks lowest on several key funding indicators

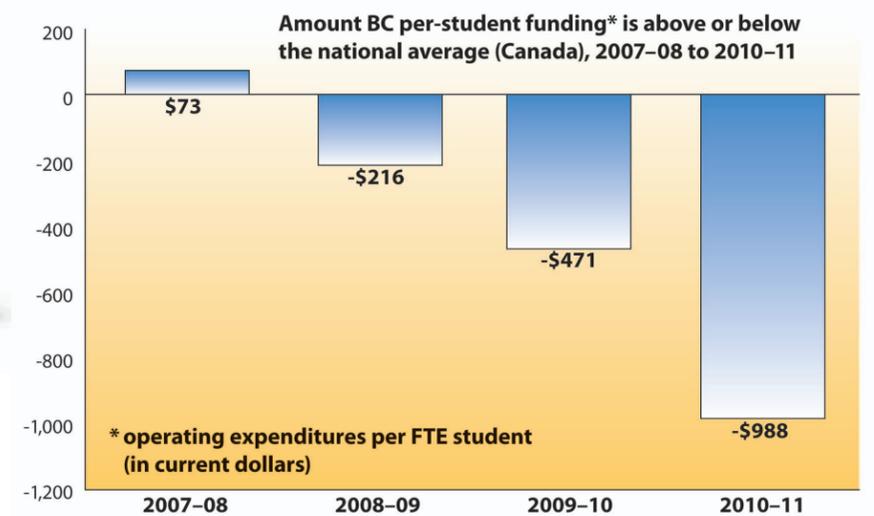
Statistics Canada data shows funding for elementary and secondary public schools increased in all provinces between 2006-07 and 2010-11, but less so in BC.

BC ranks the lowest (10th) among the provinces in terms of percentage increase in public school funding between 2006-07 and 2010-11 for total expenditures, operating expenditures, and operating expenditures per student. Even after adjusting for inflation, BC ranks the lowest (10th) among the provinces for total expenditures per student and total expenditures per capita.



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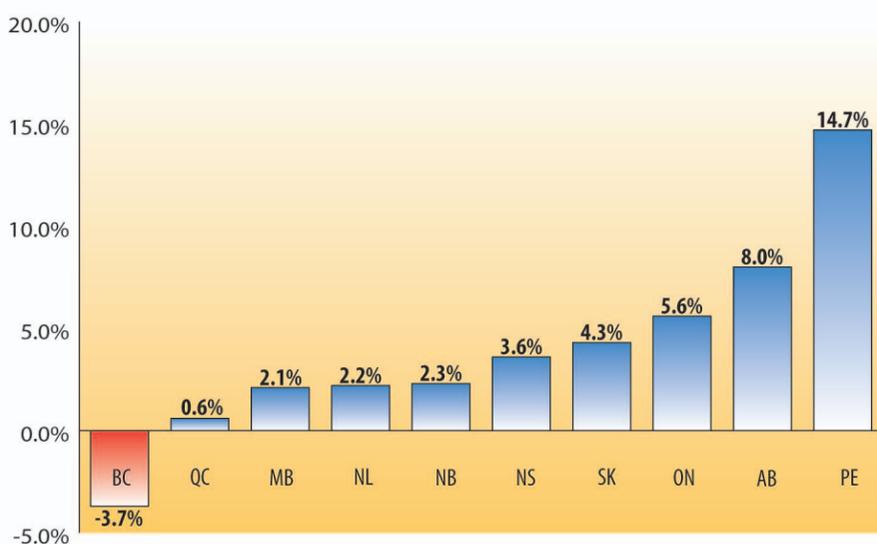
What would you do with \$1,000 extra for each child in your class?



* operating expenditures per FTE student (in current dollars)

Source: BCTF calculations with data from Statistics Canada (2013), *Summary Elementary and Secondary School Indicators for Canada, the Provinces and Territories 2006/2007 to 2010/2011*, Table 21, p. 25.

Percentage change in FTE educators, 2006-07 to 2010-11 (provinces only)



Source: BCTF calculations with data from Statistics Canada (2013), *Summary Elementary and Secondary School Indicators for Canada, the Provinces and Territories 2006/2007 to 2010/2011*, Table 12.1, p. 20.

Student-educator ratio

The student-educator ratio in Canada improved over the decade as most provinces hired more educators in elementary and secondary schools. The student-educator ratio in BC has seen little improvement since 2001-02. BC's student-educator ratio (16.8 students per educator) is considerably higher than the national average (13.8 students per educator).

Most other provinces hired more educators during a period of declining enrolment. Between 2006-07 and 2010-11, FTE educators increased in all provinces except BC. FTE educators increased by an average of 3.2% across Canada and decreased by 3.7% in BC.



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Financial vulnerability

BC citizens the most economically vulnerable

A 2011 special report by TD Bank found that households in BC are the most economically vulnerable in Canada.

BC recorded the highest Household Financial Vulnerability index, at 10.4, in 2010 (first three quarters). This index increased by 20.2% in BC since 2006, second only to Alberta at 27.9%.

For the first three quarters of 2010, BC had the only negative personal savings rate in Canada, at -4.2%. The next lowest was Atlantic Canada, at 0.7%. The Canadian average was 3.9%.

BC also had the worst debt-to-income ratio, at 160.5%. Alberta was the next worst, with 143.2%, while the Canadian average was 127%.

... and you should also know....

Overall poverty

BC records the worst overall poverty rate

In 2010, BC recorded the worst overall poverty rate (all persons), higher than any other province, for both the before-tax (15.5%) and after-tax (11.5%) poverty rate, as reported by First Call, citing Statistics Canada data.

Child and family poverty

BC records persistently high child poverty rates over the decade

Over the past decade, BC experienced persistently high child poverty rates, the worst of all provinces for most years. Between 2002 and 2009, BC recorded the highest *after-tax* child poverty rate for eight years in a row, according to First Call's 2012 *Child Poverty Report Card*.

Many of these families live in severe poverty

First Call's 2012 *Child Poverty Report Card* shows that many of these families live in severe poverty, with annual incomes thousands of dollars below the poverty line. On average, the 2010 income for a family of four living in poverty was \$13,800 below the poverty line.

The failure to provide adequate income assistance leaves many families in a state of severe poverty, affecting thousands of children. First Call's 2012 *Child Poverty Report Card* reports an average of 36,918 BC children in families living on income assistance in 2010.

BC's social welfare system fails poor families

Income-assistance benefits for BC families have not kept pace with inflation. According to the National Council of Welfare, between 1998 and 2007, inflation-adjusted annual income-assistance benefits in BC fell by \$449 for a lone parent with one child, and by \$1,474 for a couple with two children.

Perhaps this is why thousands of BC families are seeking food support. Since 2001, the number of individuals assisted by food banks increased from 67,237 in 2001 to 96,150 in 2012. About 30% of these are children.

Working poor families

BC has the third-highest child poverty rate for working families

In 2010, 43% of BC children in poverty (41,300 children) were in families where at least one adult worked in full-time, full-year employment, considerably higher than the national average (35%) and almost double the child-poverty rate of families with one or more full-time earners in Quebec (24%).

BC minimum wage well below what families need to survive

The current minimum wage in British Columbia is \$10.25 per hour. According to First Call (2012), the total earnings of a person employed 37.5 hours per week in a large city earning the current minimum wage of \$10.25 per hour, would still be \$3,000 below the poverty line.

The current minimum wage is well below what is considered to be a living wage for families with children.

Income inequality

Income-gap widens between low- and high-income families

The First Call 2012 *Child Poverty Report Card* shows the change in inflation-adjusted family income between 1989 and 2010 for low-income, middle-income, and high-income families with children. In 2010, the average family income of the wealthiest 10% of families with children was \$265,578, an increase of \$99,381 since 1989. The average family income for the 10% of families in the lowest income group was \$19,212, an increase of \$858 since 1989.

This means that the *increase* in income between 1989 and 2009 for the wealthiest 10% of families is about 116 times greater than that for the poorest 10% of families.

BC ranks poorly in income inequality

In 2009, only Alberta had higher after-tax income inequality than BC. Comparing the disparity of incomes between the highest and lowest of earners, BC Stats reported that, "Compared to other provinces, BC ranked dead last in 2009, with the largest gap between the top 20% and the bottom 20% of income earners." *The gap between the richest and poorest of BC families widened over the decade. The BC government has done less than other provinces to reduce income inequality.*



Post-secondary education

BC behind the national average for undergraduate degrees

BC ranked 8th, and is behind the national average for undergraduate degrees granted in BC per 100,000 population, according to a 2013 report by the Research Universities' Council of British Columbia. The authors estimated that "BC would need to increase its university undergraduate degree capacity by over 30% to catch up with Ontario."

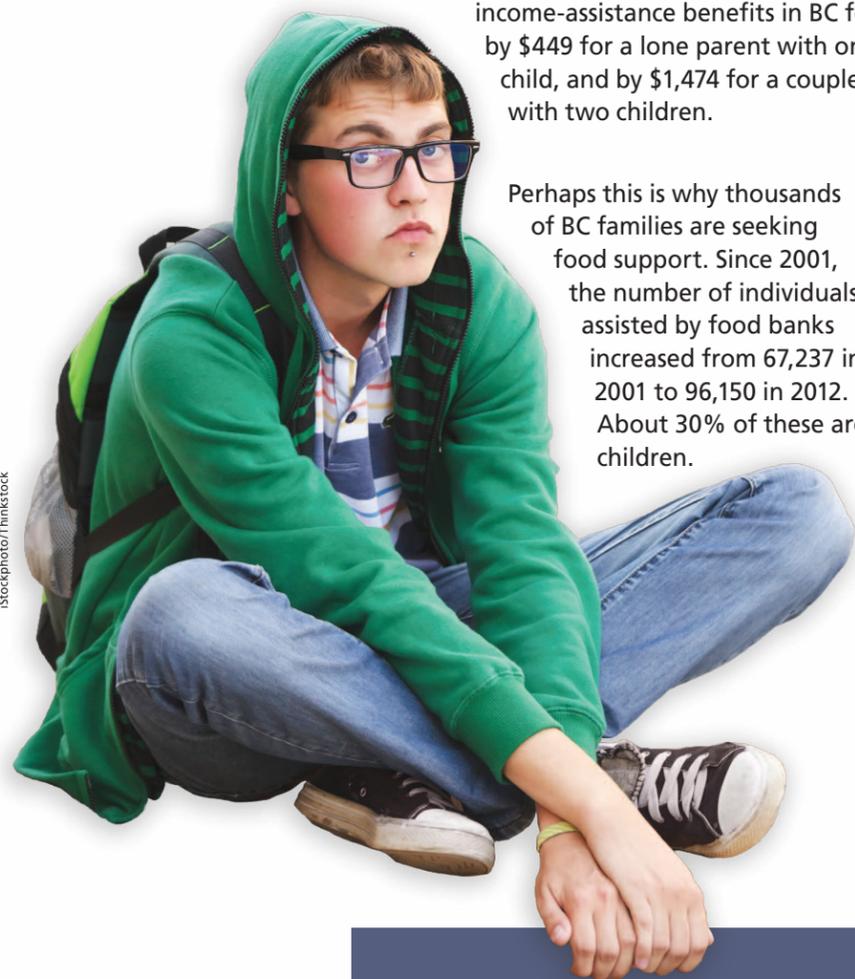
Student debt

In August 2012, the Canadian Federation of Students-BC called on the BC government to reduce tuition fees and eliminate punitive interest rates on student loans, in response to the Premier of Prince Edward Island's announcing the elimination of interest on provincial student loans. They note that tuition fees doubled in BC between 2002 and 2005 and the BC government eliminated "up-front" grant programs, adding to the debt load of post-secondary students.

With average student debt in BC at about \$27,000 (after completing a four-year degree program), the Canadian Federation of Students-BC "estimates that over the course of a 10-year repayment period, the interest accumulated on the average student loan is approximately \$8,000. At prime plus 2.5%, BC currently charges the highest rate of interest on student loans in Canada." ■

Compiled by BCTF Research and Information Services.

References available on request.



Take 5 to the polls in the May 14 Provincial Election

CHILD POVERTY

Student Debtload | Childcare

VOTE MAY 14th

FAIR TAXATION | INCOME INEQUALITY

ACCESSIBLE POST SECONDARY EDUCATION | LEARNING SPECIALIST TEACHERS

Education Funding

CLASS SIZE/CLASS COMPOSITION

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Over 12 years of Liberal interference in bargaining

By David Denyer and Kip Wood

On being elected in May of 2001, the new BC Liberal government acted immediately to bring in legislation designed specifically to limit the ability of teachers to bargain the terms and conditions of their employment.

Of the 22 bills that have been enacted in education over the last 12 years, no less than 10 have been directed at bargaining. Five of these bills stand out as being particularly egregious, and have severely restricted teachers' bargaining rights and frustrated the bargaining process.

• **Bill 18 (August 2001) made education an essential service**

Five weeks after the expiry of the collective agreement with teachers in June 2001, the BC Liberals amended the *Labour Relations Code* to include education as an essential service. The public was led to believe that there would be no more teacher strikes; however, the legislation put in place a system allowing controlled strikes as defined by the Labour Relations Board (LRB). This did not bring labour peace; instead, it undermined collective bargaining and led to longer, and nastier, disputes. Students of labour history understand that strikes and lockouts are unattractive to both parties in a dispute and hence, are effective mechanisms to break an impasse and conclude a deal.

• **Bill 28 (January 2002) stripped collective agreements of class-size and key service provisions that teachers have negotiated over many years**

It was the *Public Education Flexibility and Choice Act* (Bill 28, 2002) that was finally deemed to be unconstitutional and invalid by the BC Supreme Court in 2011. Bill 28 stripped the collective agreement of provisions limiting class-size, class-composition, and specialist ratios. More diabolical was the removal of the right to legally bargain these working conditions in the future. (Gordon Campbell: "We are not today contemplating constraining the scope of bargaining.") Teachers responded to the legislation with a "day of protest" on January 28, 2002.

• **Bill 12 (October 2005) imposed a 0% contract with no other improvements for two years**

With bargaining stalled 15 months after the expiry of the imposed

contract, and just five months after a second election majority in May 2005, the BC Liberals interfered again. The *Teachers' Collective Agreement Act* (Bill 12, 2005) imposed terms and conditions of employment for a second time in less than four years. This time, teachers mobilized and walked off the job for 10 days in October 2005.

• **Bill 33 (May 2006) established flexible limits on class size and composition that boards could elect to exceed; the aftermath left thousands of unresolved grievances**

Still without a negotiated deal with teachers in the spring of 2006, the Liberal government had another legislative trick. The *Learning Enhancement Act* (Bill 33, 2006) put class-size and composition limits in the *School Act* but also set up a toothless consultation process where individual teachers essentially bargained their own individual working conditions with their school principals. For six years, Bill 33 enabled school boards to exceed class-size "limits," as they were often called by the minister.

• **Bill 22 (March 2012) imposes a two-year wage freeze and repealed and reintroduced parts of Bills 27/28 that stripped class-size and composition contract language and were ruled "unconstitutional and invalid" by the BC Supreme Court in 2011**

The *Education Improvement Act* (Bill 22, 2012) made the controlled strike illegal, contradicting Campbell's promise that they would "protect workers' right to strike." Bill 22 was often referred to as a "kitchen sink" bill because of what it contained. Most significant in the law was the inclusion of sections already found to be unconstitutional and invalid.

The record speaks for itself. The last 12 years have witnessed a relentless attack on fundamental collective bargaining rights and hence the ability of teachers to provide adequate services and learning conditions for all students.

The message is clear: Teachers need to regain full, free, collective bargaining rights.

David Denyer, assistant director, BCTF Communications and Campaigns Division

Kip Wood, teacher, Nanaimo



Better schools for BC



BCTF proposals for provincial election platforms

Improve equity and value diversity in education

Principle: A fundamental role of public education is to ensure that all children, regardless of ethnicity, gender, or special need, have the support they need to develop as individuals and as active citizens.

Issues:

- Implement a poverty reduction plan that improves conditions for children and families.
- Ensure all children, regardless of ethnicity, gender, or special need, have the support they need, including policies, programs, and specialist professionals.
- Improve success of Aboriginal students by supporting Aboriginal educator employment equity programs in every school district; incorporating Aboriginal content and perspectives across the curriculum from K-12; and supporting and extending existing Aboriginal education programs.
- Implement a provincial strategy to ensure all school districts proactively address racism and homophobia in all schools; and, ensure that there are sufficient resources available to provide in-service and other supports for successful implementation of such a strategy.
- Reject privatization because it creates inequality and weakens public education (examples: bring your own device; credit from private school courses; school rankings).

Support student learning by improving class size and class composition, and improved learning specialist teacher ratios and caseloads

Principle: The best educational outcomes for all of our children are achieved when they have access to the individual attention that engages and supports them.

Issues:

- Recognize the increasing diversity and challenges in our classrooms that requires smaller classes to meet the needs of all students, including those with special needs.
- Provide support to meet special needs through increased learning specialist support teachers and in-service opportunities.
- Define provincial minimum supports for students with special needs and target funding to ensure the resources are focused on these students.
- Provide learning assistance teachers for students who require limited additional support to be successful.
- Improve preparation time for all teachers to reflect the increased demands in our diverse classrooms.

- Provide information and communications technology and appropriate support, including teacher-librarians, to assist students develop information literacy.

Increase investment in public education

Principle: Public education is an investment that ensures the current and future social, cultural, and economic health of the society and improved equity and success for students.

Issues:

- Restore funding for K-12 education to at least the average percentage of the GDP spent on education in Canada as a whole.
- Adopt taxation policies that allow for an increased investment in public education and other public services.

Respectfully engage with teachers through their organization on all curriculum, assessment, and other education policies

Principle: Maintaining and building on the success of an internationally-recognized public education system requires that government engage respectfully with the profession through their organization.

Issues:

- Review and revise the "BC Education Plan" so that it provides clear education policies and is consistent with the goals of education as expressed in the Charter for Public Education and the Principles of Learning (learning requires the active participation of the student; people learn in a variety of ways and at different rates; learning is both an individual and a group process).
- Develop short- and long-term curriculum implementation plans for education change, including the "BC Education Plan", and provide adequate resources, including funding, time, and provision for in-service.
- Engage the profession in decision-making through their organization—the BCTF—as the representative voice at provincial and local levels.
- Discontinue the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) and develop with the BCTF an authentic assessment system for student learning and school improvement.
- Consult with the BCTF in an examination of the Teacher Regulation Branch.
- Reconsider the development of a replacement, province-wide, centralized Student Information System.

