

Sweeping changes discussed

The Minister of Education has initiated a series of high level discussions which may culminate in legislation that will significantly affect the relationship between teachers, principals, and others, as well as the way in which all

teachers' salaries are determined.

Included in the discussion are: provincial versus local or regional bargaining; scope of bargaining, including the right to negotiate learning and working conditions contracts;

a basic four level system of categorization for all teachers; and a Teachers' Professional Act which might incorporate such aspects as basic control over certification and competence.

A Teachers' Professional Act

is being sought by the BCTF, with a committee meeting since last fall to produce a report for the 1975 AGM. Further, the Federation has a policy that the Department should transfer control of entry into the profession to a division of certification to be established by the BCTF.

Participants have been told that government representatives are anxious to hear the views of teachers and trustees on these and other matters, and have the impression that major changes in the Public Schools Act will be recommended to the next sitting of the Legislature.

Discussions, therefore, are exploratory in nature, related to major problems and possible solutions, rather than draft legislation per se.

BCTF representatives have insisted on the right to report fully to the Executive Committee as discussions progress, and to report to the Representative Assembly and to the

general membership. BCTF representatives also feel that it is essential to broaden the scope of the discussions to include the responsibility, authority, and relationship of all school district personnel and school boards.

The BCTF has the right, of course, to withdraw from discussions at any time and to dissociate itself from and oppose any legislation which may be introduced.

One of the topics is negotiation of learning and working conditions contracts at a local level, long Federation policy but resisted strongly by trustees.

Discussion on collective bargaining alone will be extensive, covering such topics as the bargaining unit, arbitration and the right to strike, scope, time limits, and procedures.

A variety of possibilities will be discussed such as a four-level system which would

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COURAGE



BCTF disagrees with overspending charge

No evidence was given by Education Minister Eileen Dailly that would justify fiscal irresponsibility on the part of school boards says BCTF president Jim MacFarlan.

Teacher and trustee representatives met briefly with the Minister December 20 following her statements that "increases in school district budgets indicated very clearly boards in general are not exercising fiscal control."

The meeting was scheduled after the Minister surprised teachers and trustees with a sudden announcement that school costs had "skyrocketed" in preliminary budgets but offered no breakdown of the amount.

"We are convinced that the original news release by the Minister which gave blanket condemnation of local boards was not justified," says MacFarlan.

Calling the Minister's

statements entirely contradictory, MacFarlan recalled the government has expressed a commitment to reducing large classes. In addition the Minister had instructed boards to reject federal L.I.P. grants and submit budgets reflecting full amounts to meet educational needs.

"Boards are making up for years of neglect under the previous government," says MacFarlan. "We think increases in school board budgets for 1974 are entirely reasonable as a catch-up factor and because of recent excessive inflation."

"We are urging boards," MacFarlan says "not to make cuts in projected staff needs, but to hire teachers needed to reduce class sizes, and not to make cuts in those essential items directly related to quality education — school equipment, supplies, library books."



ABOVE, Pat Walsh, BCSTA president talks with Jim MacFarlan, BCTF president, and Bill Broadley, first vice-president, after the meeting with the Minister.

AND BELOW, some members of the group who are discussing sweeping changes in the education system pause for a moment outside the legislative building:

from left, Henry Armstrong, Rob Buzza, Jim MacFarlan, Bob Bowman, and Jurd Kirby.

Photos by George Simpson

Major reform possible

It is easy to tinker with public education — to make changes of form but not of substance. Many of the liberal reformers of the 1960's presented proposals of this sort. Suggested reforms were often dramatic and frequently had popular appeal for those teachers, parents and students who held a common view that the present system was inadequate.

But change, no matter how dramatic in appearance or populist in origin, is illusionary rather than real if it fails to challenge the century-old hierarchical power structure of education.

The roles of all of the groups in the educational pyramid — which has classroom teachers at the bottom — have to be re-examined. As teachers we cannot accept any re-definition of our responsibilities and remuneration without an equally searching re-definition of the responsibilities of school boards, the Department of Education, superintendents, secretary-treasurers and others in the bureaucracy. We accept the need for basic reform of the entire system not merely one part of it.

Concurrent with any alteration of responsibility has to come a change in authority necessary to fulfil responsibility. For example, if teachers have a responsibility beyond their classroom for ensuring quality education, then they must be given authority collectively to make the major educational decisions affecting the school and through their organization to share the decision-making power at the district level. Of necessity, this means that the authority of superintendents and boards, as well as principals, must be changed both through legislation and in practice.

While we have been justifiably critical of the existing authority structure we have only outlined our alternatives in very vague and general terms. Several examples come to mind. The concept of staff committees is vital to the democratization of decision-making. Yet we have had very little written on the theory of staff committees and even less about the experiments in schools with functioning committees.

Peer evaluation is another matter which could become a fact rather than a theory. We have done very little to try and develop a practical model for carrying this out.

Perhaps the February RA and the 1974 AGM will have to make a decision as to the method of selection of principals. Do we favor the present system or should the staff elect the principal? Are there other alternatives?

It was not long ago that many of these problems seemed academic. Today they are real, practical and urgent. In every staff-room and at each local association meeting these and other matters which are under discussion in Victoria should be vigorously debated.

Only after there has been a thorough reassessment of the responsibilities of all teachers and the groups in the system should there be a change in the salary structure. It is completely wrong to attempt to bring about fundamental changes in education merely through manipulation of traditional patterns of remuneration. Such manipulations, if divorced from genuine substantive reforms in the system, can only be viewed as a cost-cutting device masquerading under the banner of reform.

Major reforms appear possible, perhaps even probable. If the outcome is an education system which produces quality education in every classroom then we can support the changes. However, there is one important reform which should precede or at least parallel the others — there must be a very substantial decrease in the pupil teacher ratio. If teachers are responsible for quality education in their classrooms then they must have class sizes which make quality possible.

Ontario teachers fight for right to strike

Ontario's 105,000 teachers — with the largest political demonstration in the history of the province behind them — returned to schools in January after teacher leaders agreed to extend the effective date of mass resignations to January 31.

Meanwhile, efforts are being made either by negotiation or mediation, to reach agreements.

A compromise was reached when Premier William Davis and Education Minister Thomas Wells agreed to hold up passage on Bill 274, legislation denying the right to strike to the teachers and applying compulsory arbitration to the disputes with 16 school boards across the province. The legislation would have virtually imposed forced labor on some 7800 teachers.

A province-wide one-day strike took place December 19 highlighted by a rally of 33,000 teachers at Maple Leaf Gardens followed by a march to the legislature at Queens Park.

Jim Killeen, Canadian Teachers' Federation President, said it was the biggest demonstration ever held at Queens Park. The previous record holder was a turn-out of 10,000 to 12,000 building trades unionists opposing government amendments to the Ontario Labor Relations Act.

Killeen told the rally that teachers should not stay quietly on the job when they know the government is retroactively depriving them of their basic right to resign from an intolerable situation. "Is this really democracy or is it dictatorship?" he asked.



Tony McCullough, Oliver president, in his biology lab.

Oliver class sizes

Hopes pinned on referendum

If you look at the BCTF survey of classes across the province, a number of districts with large classes jump out at you. One of these is Oliver.

There were no small classes in Oliver. Of 31 total classes, all ranged from 26 to 36 plus; in fact, this year at Oliver, classes over 36, an intolerable situation, increased in number. In 1972 there were some classes under 25, in 1973 there were none.

The situation has changed significantly since the administration and teachers at Oliver elementary hired a teacher and changed teaching loads, according to Tony McCullough, local president.

'We had better make gains this year in class sizes or we turn off a lot of teachers,' is the general feeling.

'It's quite hard on one's conscience,' Kari Nichol says, 'because it was impossible to teach adequately in this situation.' She had a remedial group of 33 in the morning and 35 in the afternoon.

In Grade 5 arithmetic, she points out, where the spread is so great, as a teacher she has

to individualize instruction but simply can't.

The school plant itself has outlived its usefulness. The Oliver Elementary School was assembled at different times: 1929 for the original four-room school, expanded in 1937 to six rooms; in 1941 a new elementary school was built and in 1964 there was an addition to the elementary school placed on the other side of the gymnasium. As a result, to get to each end of the school it is necessary to walk through the gymnasium.

Parents and teachers can see modern elementary schools in other districts against which they compare their own outmoded physical plant.

One parent, Vena Jacobsen, said, 'You can't say children aren't getting a good education but it's not as good as it could be.' She works as an unpaid teacher aide in the school and is sympathetic to what the teachers are putting up with.

Another parent, Caroline Smith, working also as a volunteer aide, notes that the teachers were locked in, having to spend all their time making sure children are in their pro-

per place in these oversized classes. 'I think it's terrible,' she said.

At a recent board meeting two trustees are reported to have said that the situation was less than satisfactory. Parents and teachers do feel the board is aware and interested in solving the problems.

The staff in the elementary school discussed their problem and decided to hire a new teacher which meant re-allocating classes around the school. It also meant, of course, that two teachers will have to share a poor room. 'No easy solutions.'

Tony McCullough says there is generally a mood of optimism because the board is working on solutions.

At the moment there is hope from a one million dollar referendum due this spring. There's a division of opinion on how the portion for the elementary school complex will be spent. An architect says he could renovate the core, but this is described as 'a series of semi-satisfactory compromises,' by observers who feel it is better to build a new school entirely.

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CHANGES DISCUSSED

greatly simplify the present salary grid. Under such an arrangement, professionally certified teachers would begin at the first level and move to the second on the basis of performance as evaluated by their colleagues in the school according to specified criteria.

A limited number of second-level teachers would be elected by their colleagues within the school on an annual basis to serve in an educational leadership role at the third-level, a role similar to that now undertaken by the principal. Level four would be reserved for district-wide positions, likely filled annually by the school board.

Basic to such a proposal is

the concept that all Level 2 teachers, for example, regardless of training or experience, should receive the same salary.

Such an arrangement would be absolutely contrary to BCTF policy which supports recognition for experience and certification. The Federation has been pressing for years, however, to shorten the length of increments pattern and reduce the number of scales.

Formation of the committee was announced by the Minister of Education on December 20 following a meeting with trustee and teacher representatives.

Ten days of meetings have been scheduled for January.

Attending the first were Jack Fleming, Deputy Minister of Education, Bill Reid, Superintendent of Field Services, Ted Killough, Registrar and Marguerite Reed, Special Advisor to the Ministers' Committee, trustee representatives Pat Walsh, President, Peter Bullen, Vice-president, Henry Armstrong, Executive Director, and Bob Bowman and BCTF representatives Jim MacFarlan, President, Bill Broadley, First Vice-president, Bob Buzza, General Secretary, and Jurd Kirby, Director of Economic Welfare.

A report on the meetings will be made to the Representative Assembly at its meeting on February 1 and 2.