

Bill 173 enforces the law

The Minister of Education has prevented a massive confrontation between teachers and trustees by introducing Bill 173, which deals with settling teachers' salaries for 1975.

Prior to the introduction of the bill, the B.C. School Trustees Association was playing havoc with the intent and spirit of the Public Schools Act, and was attempting to force teachers into a provincial bar-

gaining situation that the association had been unable to achieve through legislative changes.

All indications were that the BCSTA planned to stand firm in its refusal to meet teachers'

associations except on a provincial basis, then appoint only one arbitrator when the disputes in the 68 districts automatically went to arbitration on November 14.

That action would have made it impossible to carry out all the arbitrations required before awards had to be in on January 1.

In this situation the 1974 agreements would have automatically continued, and it would have been illegal for boards and associations to agree in January on any kind of increase for 1975.

In short, the BCSTA set out this fall to make the provisions of the Public Schools Act unworkable.

Fortunately, the government was not deceived by the ploy, and introduced Bill 173 to guarantee that the arbitration process called for in the Public Schools Act would work successfully this year.

The new legislation, effective for this year only, does the following:

- extends the deadline for negotiated agreements by two weeks — to November 29;
- extends all other deadlines two weeks as well (e.g. arbitration awards must be handed down by January 15 instead of January 1);
- limits arbitration board personnel to a maximum of two hearings;
- requires a separate arbitration hearing for each school district;
- requires a school board, not its agent, to name its representative on an arbitration board.

President Jim MacFarlan greeted the new legislation enthusiastically. 'We congratulate the Minister for ensuring that the law of this province will be observed. Her actions favored neither side; they merely ensured that the procedures in the Public Schools Act, which have worked well for many years, will work again this year.'

MacFarlan said that the legislation makes it impossible for the BCSTA to sabotage the arbitration process, and that arbitration hearings will therefore be held in all districts that find them necessary.

The result will be that every local association will have an agreement with its school board, as in past years.

MacFarlan called on school trustees to reconsider their stand of not bargaining with their teachers. 'Under the new legislation there must be an arbitration hearing for each school district that requires one. If arbitrations must be carried out locally anyway, boards may as well avoid the expense and time involved in arbitration by coming to agreements with their teachers' associations.'

Despite press reports, the issue at stake this fall was not whether bargaining was to be done locally or provincially; it was whether or not the law of the province was to be observed.

The Minister clarified this point by saying, 'The whole question of whether the bargaining process between the teachers and trustees of this province should be done on a local, zonal or provincial basis is now in the hands of the all-party Select Standing Committee of the Legislature. This group will be making recommendations for possible legislation in the spring. Nothing in this interim Bill should be construed as a direction to the Committee.'

Jim MacFarlan stressed the point also. 'There may well be legislative changes next spring, but until these changes are made, we believe the present laws must be observed. Our stance this fall, therefore, was that we were ready and willing to bargain with the trustees or their agent in the manner specified in the Public Schools Act. The BCSTA's attempts to subvert this law could have resulted in a disastrous situation for education in this province. The action of the government has prevented that disaster from happening.'

MacFarlan was visibly angered by BCSTA president Eileen Madson's charge that the legislation had been ghost-written by the BCTF.

'I was appalled by the completely unwarranted attack on the integrity of the Minister and of our organization. The BCSTA has taken some cheap shots at people recently, but this one tops them all. For the record, no one in the BCTF had any knowledge whatsoever of the content of Bill 173 until that bill was introduced in the Legislature.'

In a letter to the presidents of local associations, MacFarlan wrote: 'Sincere congratulations to all local associations for their patience and forbearance during the frustrating weeks we have all just been through.'

'And a special word of commendation to those local associations that took various actions in defense of their right to bargain collectively with their employers.'

'Although the BCTF has been charged with arranging those actions at the local level, local presidents know that that charge is simply not true.'

'As we said in our brief to the Select Standing Committee, our local associations have local autonomy in salary matters, and they practise it.'

MacFarlan said he was pleased with the variety of actions local associations evolved to dramatize their inability to meet with their school boards, and singled out the 'dramatic actions' taken by teachers in Coquitlam.

'The rotating strikes, which have been criticized by some, were in fact acts of considerable courage. The Coquitlam teachers acted on behalf of all teachers whose collective bargaining rights were threatened by the BCSTA.'

'The Coquitlam teachers, their executive committee and, in particular, their president, Les Phillips, are to be commended.'

newsletter

BRITISH COLUMBIA TEACHERS' FEDERATION

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'Super-strong executive'

Anger shows in Coquitlam



Behind the headlines of the Coquitlam teachers' rotating strikes there's another story.

It's the story of the Coquitlam Teachers' Association executive committee which met every afternoon, putting five to six hours outside their normal teaching duties as they planned each day's activities and made sure that communications were maintained between themselves and the membership.

Coquitlam Teachers' president Les Phillips, the man in the eye of the storm, speaks highly of 'a super strong executive' but most observers during the two days of conflict agree that Les Phillips himself provided cool, strong leadership as the emotions built up.

There were about 450 teachers involved altogether in the two-day rotating strikes, with 420 turning up for the events — the other 30 having various other commitments, Les Phillips says, 'We had really good support.'

'Even those who didn't agree with it in principle, supported the association,' he notes, 'and some of those opposed became our strongest supporters when the issues were clear.'

About 300 teachers met the first day at the Airport Inn, Richmond, where the concilia-

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Coquitlam teachers at the Airport Inn were asked by the conciliators meeting with the BCSTA officials not to crowd outside the door, so they came back down the hall to the main area. Later the teachers left to study the Public Schools Act on matters related to bargaining.



Outside the BCSTA office on windy Howe Street, Les Phillips reads a prepared statement to William Freeborn, BCSTA agent, requesting negotiations between Coquitlam teachers and the board.

Petulant cry will not hide delusion

The purpose of the new legislation introduced last week, according to explanatory notes to Bill 173, is 'to ensure that orderly arbitration procedures respecting teachers' salaries take place in respect of collective agreements covering the 1975 calendar year.'

Opposition leaders generally have recognized the wisdom of bringing in legislation. Liberal leader David Anderson, for example, said: 'The bill is simply to enforce the law. One can hardly object to a bill to enforce the law.'

Yet the BCSTA, in a petulant outburst, speaks of 'favoring teachers' and legislation 'ghost written' by teachers. This, when 68 boards have committed or condoned their 'phantom agent' to ignore the law, to ignore established practice of 25 years, and to dictate the precise form negotiations will take rather than as the law prescribes. The statute was ignored and disruption of established and orderly processes became the order of the day.

Thus we have a call to bargaining on July 12 in one room in Vancouver at a time when no reasonable person could expect local associations to be prepared. Representatives from local associations who did respond requesting the meeting on their home turf received no reply from the BCSTA. The charade in conciliation became even more complex when the BCSTA rented 17 rooms in the Hotel Vancouver with teacher representatives to be allowed to meet a live trustee, provided the trustee was not from the teacher's district.

What is surprising to us and should be surprising to local trustees is that the leadership of the BCSTA could apparently be so deluded by its own antics as to believe such perverse and mischievous tactics could be approved by the Legislature.

Had teachers' salary bargaining been covered by the labor code, teachers could have documented their claims of lack of good faith bargaining and of unilateral employer attempts to vary the bargaining units, and looked to the Labour Relations Board for a remedy. But there is no Labour Relations Board involved in teacher-trustee agreements and it was therefore necessary for the Minister to put the BCSTA back on track, which she did with legislation that was preventative rather than punitive. We congratulate the Minister for ensuring that the provisions of the Public Schools Act will be followed.

Petulance and recriminations by the BCSTA leadership will not hide predictable consequences of their own delusions. As one local trustee is reported to have said, the board appointed the BCSTA to negotiate for it in good faith. 'We have been let down badly.' Trustee Shirley Staley, Kelowna, says she voted for provincial bargaining. 'But this is provincial non-bargaining. We are now caught in the middle.'

It is not too late for school boards either to act for themselves or at least demand some responsible decision-making by their agent.

Coquitlam teachers

(Continued from page 1)

tors were meeting with the BCSTA. They demonstrated at the Airport Inn during the morning, and in the afternoon went back to their schools for a study session of the Public Schools Act, particularly the section on bargaining.

The next day, Tuesday, the next group of teachers went to the BCSTA offices on Howe Street.

Support from some school board members also helped the teachers, Phillips said, and named Eunice Parker, Gwen Chute and Berenice Gilmore, as trustees who did not agree with the BCSTA position.

'Our teachers are not militant but we are prepared to stand for basic rights — and that's only human. I suppose you could say we're concerned human beings. It's really not salaries that's the issue, but the right to negotiate. Normally, people are used to having strikes over salaries.'

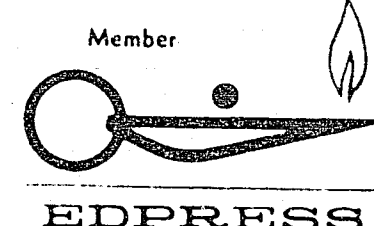
Another scene from the Airport Inn as Coquitlam teachers waited for the conciliators to come out of their meeting.

BRITISH COLUMBIA TEACHERS' FEDERATION

newsLetter

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Henry says:

Democracy is expediency

The BCSTA presented a brief on bargaining to the Select Standing Committee meeting at Salmon Arm, September 20. It was not much of a brief. It drew little public attention. The news media failed to report the meeting.

Therefore, in the public interest and for the files of the Sun, Province, et al., we present the following report.

What does provincial bargaining mean?

No clear answer to that question emerged from the trustees' presentation to the Select Standing Committee at the Salmon Arm hearings. What did emerge was confusion over what provincial bargaining meant and a request that surprised committee members for strike/lockout to become part of the unclear provincial process.

McClelland, Social Credit — Langley, said, 'I find many of the comments incredible, about the strike weapon, particularly coming from the BCSTA.' He wanted to know at what point, if any, the BCSTA would expect government to legislate teachers back to work.

He was told that the government should step in when the situation became critical in the same way it would for essential services such as police or firemen. However, on page six of the trustees' brief it said that teachers could not be considered an essential service. More confusion.

Later during the hearing, Pat Jordan, Social Credit Vernon, asked, 'How do you really determine when there is a crisis situation?'

Henry Armstrong, Executive Director of the BCSTA, suggested that the length of strike was part of a political process that might take three months or three days.

'But doesn't that make a mockery of the fundamental rights that you're advocating?' asked Jordan. 'I don't think so because there are other rights, too,' Armstrong replied.

Pat Jordan said, 'My democratic rights are only good so long as it's politically expedient.'

Armstrong replied, 'Isn't that what democratic rights are?'

Colin Gabelmann, NDP — North Vancouver, suggested that the task of the committee was to create a better system of bargaining between teachers and their employers but that one of the major considerations 'must be the welfare of the kids in the schools' because, he said, it was important teaching continue throughout the school year. 'We have to judge whether a system that has been in existence, that has only led to several work days' lost in 30 years is better than a system you're proposing that might, based on the evidence we've heard from both sides, lead to more disruption.'

Armstrong replied, 'I would like to respond to that by dealing with the two points. To me, when you emphasize the interest in students in this situation, what you are really saying by implication is that the government did not have the good of the public of British

Columbia at heart when it allowed the ferry strike. And I refuse to believe that as I'm sure you do.'

In reply to the second part, Armstrong said an analysis showed that from Ontario west there are twice the number of days lost in illegal strikes as lost in legal strikes. In Alberta, where strikes have been legal for some time, he said, there was only a total in four years of 1,250,000 student days lost. Between B.C. and Ontario alone, in these four years, two and one-half million days.

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'quote . . . unquote'

'While strikes may have many undesirable social and economic effects, no society has found a more satisfactory method of resolving management-labor disputes. The pressures which strikes bring to both sides of a dispute force a greater degree of genuine and meaningful discussions than any other method. Moreover, it can be argued that meaningful negotiations between labor and management produce economic and social benefits that far outweigh the costs of the occasional strike.' (BCSTA presentation at Salmon Arm.)

'Trustees condemned Coquitlam teachers for their strikes which have been going on this week saying they are clearly illegal and show that teachers are no longer professionals nor do they care about the students in their care.' (Province, November 6, 1974.)

'Canadians are certainly fed up with strikes in public services, whether legal or illegal, and by any name, be it study session, booking-off or other euphemism. More particularly, the public is frustrated beyond mere exasperation by the apparent immunity of labor organizations to the laws of the land, court order or contract terms.' Sun editorial, Nov. 7.

Reprint New Westminster Columbian, November 6, 1974.

Nobody wins this one

No one stands to win from the unhappy situation in Coquitlam's schools. Not the school board, which turned its bargaining power over to the B.C. School Trustees Association. Not the teachers who demonstrated by halting services to selected schools on a rotating basis in an effort to get negotiations started. And certainly not the students, much as they may enjoy their unexpected extra "holidays."

EDITORIAL

But the ones who stand to lose the most could turn out in the end to be the B.C. School Trustees Association, which is acting as bargaining agent for most of B.C.'s school boards. There is evidence that some at least of the boards who threw their lot in with the BCSTA are succumbing to a sense of unease about the way things are not progressing.

The Coquitlam school board, for example, has passed a resolution unanimously instructing its agent — the BCSTA — to meet with the conciliator appointed by the provincial government. The BCSTA refused.

The BCSTA's refusal would seem to suggest that the local school boards have given away more than they knew. Coquitlam, at least, has found it has no control over the monster that it helped to create. It would seem fair comment that — at this moment — the school boards involved no longer have any say in the negotiations over wages and working conditions with the teachers they hire to operate the schools they build to accommodate the children of the people who elect them.

This situation is a far cry from the days when school boards were created, when the boards built the schools as they wished for the people who elected them, hired the teachers who would provide the education their electors sought for their children.

Gradually, province-wide standards have grown up. School

buildings are authorized, finally now, by the department of education in Victoria, costs are scrutinized there, courses of study flow from the centre. Less and less real power lies in the hands of individual school boards.

But some measure of power does remain. It remains in the school board's ability to raise some of its own money through property taxes. This economic lifeline enables the boards to add a few touches here and there — in wages, in courses offered, in special studies — to shape the schools in its district into something the local people — the school boards' electors — want.

Having this power to tax directly, the school boards have a responsibility to be involved directly in the spending of the money they raise. Many of them, like Coquitlam, have now given up this power to the BCSTA, so far as teachers' salaries are concerned.

It becomes fair to ask one question: Once the school boards have given up this last touch of power and responsibility, what reason is there for the continued existence of school boards?

If wages and conditions are going to be negotiated on a province-wide scale, it would be reasonable for all school financing to be provided on a province-wide scale. Teachers would be hired by Victoria, logically, and local people would no longer have any say whatsoever about local educational matters.

If that is what the local school boards want, then they are probably doing the wise thing in turning over their negotiating powers to the BCSTA.

But if they are beginning to wonder about the wisdom of moving in this direction — as Coquitlam's futile resolution clearly indicates that Coquitlam's school board is beginning to wonder — then maybe this unhappy year will be of value after all.

It will be if it jolts British Columbia's school trustees into a full realization of just what they are doing.

Status of Women conference

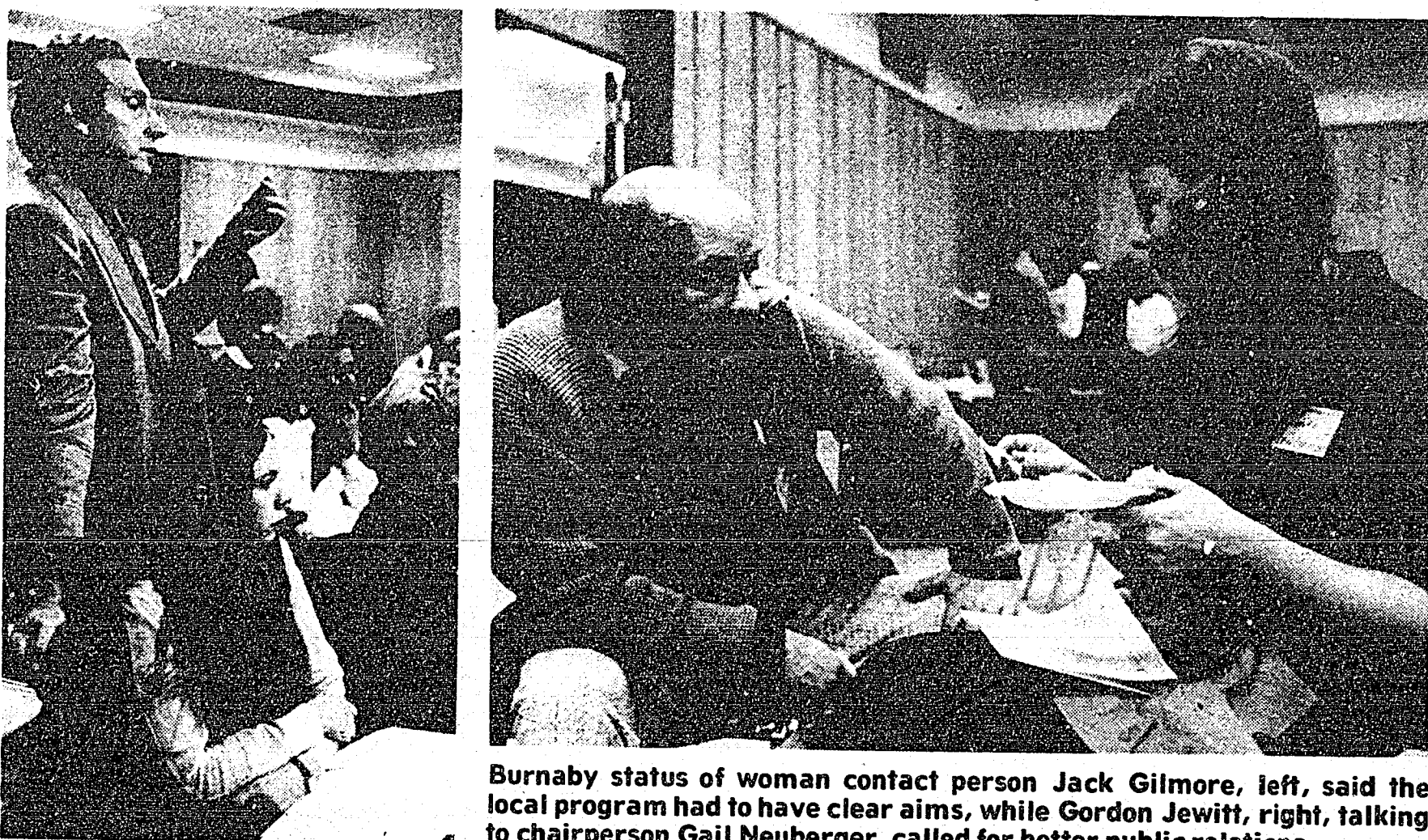
Credibility common problem

Local contact people for the status of women program were given a boost by a conference

held in the BCTF building, October 26, when they found problems in common, and, more important, that help was available.



Organizers of the conference from left, Heather Knapp, Nora Grove, and Linda Shuto offered ideas on making the local program effective.



Burnaby status of woman contact person Jack Gilmore, left, said the local program had to have clear aims, while Gordon Jewitt, right, talking to chairperson Gail Neuberger, called for better public relations.

Two main problems emerged from the status of women program, which this year has gone to the local level.

One is a problem of credibility — having the program treated seriously — and the other involves having clear aims for the local program itself.

BCTF president Jim MacFarlan made the keynote speech of the conference, reviewing the struggle of the women's movement in society and placing the federation program in a historical context. Special guests from the Department of Education were Reva Dexter, special Advisor on Sex Discrimination and Jean Burgess, Research and Development Branch.

Delegates stood up and related problems each had encountered and shared ways of handling them.

One suggestion came from Nora Grove, Vancouver, who said, 'It's important that the status of women committee report to every local association meeting and be visible.'

Jack Gilmore, Burnaby contact person, told delegates they must have a really 'meaningful action program — you just can't meet and talk.'

Gordon Jewitt, Cranbrook, stressed that lines of communication were important, noting that status of women could be identified with burning bras, lesbianism, and the like, whereas the program was concerned with human rights, dignity and equality. 'There has been a lot of poor public relations for women's groups, but I expect this conference will serve to clear the aims of the program. People who are against the program are passive and are not really well informed.'

'Men tend to interpret woman's equality as women's dominance. This seems to pose a threat to a small group of men.'

Gale Neuberger, chairperson of the Task Force on the Status of Women, touched a vital area of the program when she told delegates that the weakness in the Federation was the lack of women involved in policy areas. She urged delegates to have more women teachers participate in Federation activities.

The status of women program is generally recognized as having been one of the more successful programs undertaken by the Federation in recent years. Linda Shuto, the staff person responsible for the program, urged delegates to report on the conference when they go back to their local associations.

Susan Crowley, Prince Rupert, hoped that the members back home would get some of the enthusiasm that was obvious at the conference itself.

Sally Walters, Castlegar, said the conference gave her two things: one, an awareness that more people were interested and that she was not alone; and, that the problems she had encountered were not unique to her local. 'This conference has given me some ideas where we have gone wrong. I'm really glad I came.'

From Vancouver Island West, Catherine Garnett said that she attended the conference because the district needed an effective status of women person.

The status of women person, she said, should be a voting member of the local executive with a budget, and have an active committee. The program has been given support by the BCTF Executive Committee she noted, but it would also need support of the power structure in the local executive committees. 'I'd like to see more of these conferences — it's an excellent idea.'

Reciprocal pension agreements

Each province has own rules

CTF has announced that reciprocal agreements for teacher pension plans will soon be extended to Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, leaving only teachers in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island excluded.

Unfortunately, the agreements do not permit teachers to move from one educational jurisdiction to another without some loss of pension rights.

The government of B.C., for example, may use life expectancy tables to calculate the present value of a pension based on the years of service in the teacher's previous province at \$12,000, but if the teacher's previous province transfers only \$6,000, the teacher will receive half the pension amount that would normally be payable under the pension rules in B.C. In effect the teacher will only get credit for the first years of service in the new province.

Salaries and therefore contributions made by the

teacher during the early teaching years in his/her previous province would be lower, therefore the amount transferred will not be sufficient to pay for the full value of the pension based on a higher salary.

The loss grows progressively larger as the time between transfer to the new province and the date of retirement increases. There have been cases where the service with the previous province was six or eight years, but the amount of money transferred was only sufficient to provide pension benefits for two years of service in the province of retirement. If the importing province — and B.C. is mainly an importing province — is going to make up the deficit, either taxpayers or the existing pension plan would have to be tapped.

An equitable solution would be an equitable sharing of the costs by all provinces.

In B.C. there is pro-rata reciprocity among B.C. government-controlled pension plans. This means that a person who leaves the B.C. civil service or municipal service and enters the B.C. teaching profession, provided he/she leaves his/her contributions in the former plan, will receive a final pension based upon his/her service in both plans and calculated on the final salary average in the latter plan.

The B.C. government will make such an agreement with any pension authority but to date the other provinces have not been willing in that the cost to them is more than they wish to assume.

Each province has its own rules, it is essential that any teacher leaving or coming to B.C. should contact the Commissioner of Teachers' Pensions in each province to ensure maintenance of pension rights.

Recalculation of pensions started

Bruce Wiggins of William Mercer Limited, Saskatoon Branch Office, has been retained by the BCTF to conduct a feasibility study regarding recalculation of existing teachers' pensions according to Ernie Hall, Provincial Secretary and Bill Broadley, BCTF First Vice-President. Wiggins taught in Saskatchewan for 20 years, served 13 years on the staff of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation specializing in pensions and served as teacher representative on the Saskatchewan Superannuation Commission from 1954 to 1971. On his retirement from teaching in 1972, he joined William Mercer Ltd.

His report will be reviewed by government officials at a later date when further meetings between the representatives will be held. The Provincial Secretary indicated

that before any decision is made on the feasibility study, the government intends to consider the implications for other plans such as the Public Service Superannuation Plan and the Municipal Superannuation Plan.

When the Teachers' Pensions Act was amended in the spring of 1974 no provision was made for the recalculation of existing allowances to bring them into conformity with the current Act. As this has been a long-standing item of BCTF pension policy, meetings were held with the Provincial Secretary to seek ways and means of fulfilling the policy.

To this end the BCTF and government agreed that a feasibility study to cover all aspects of recalculation of existing allowances was required before any further action would be taken. The report should be ready by May.

Many kinds of excellence

By JOHN CHURCH
BCTF Staff

A new BCTF policy on scholarship exams was established by the Representative Assembly, October 1974, as a result of recommendations from the Professional Development and Curriculum Committee, and the BCTF Executive Committee.

The intent of the new policy on scholarship funds is to separate financial assistance to pupils on the basis of need from the educational objective of rewarding pupils for excellence in achievement. The action urges the Department of Education to increase financial assistance to those pupils who show financial need to continue their education.

Further to the foregoing delineation of purpose in awarding funds, the Federation policy now recognizes that there are many kinds of excel-

lence exhibited by pupils, meriting recognition and reward. Since teachers in the schools are more aware of the growth and development of pupils, it is recognized that the school is the most appropriate body to identify pupils to be rewarded, and that the Department should not be involved in this role.

The monies for this purpose should be allocated to the schools on an equitable basis for distribution on a basis agreed to by each school community (e.g., pupils, parents, teachers). The schools who favor scholarship examinations could continue to reward pupils for this particular kind of excellence.

Finally, the policy urges that funds be provided for pupils who design and undertake self-initiated projects which will be useful to their personal career goals and/or of benefit to society in some manner. This

would provide capable students with the opportunity to initiate, in concert with teachers at the school level, projects which would be related to future needs of society and have great interest for the pupils involved.

On Tuesday, October 29, 1974, Jim MacFarlan, President, Ross Regan, Wes Knapp and John Church, BCTF staff, presented the brief to the Minister, Eileen Dailly.

While asking for additional time in which to study the full intent of the brief, the Minister did acknowledge that there appeared to be agreement that many additional kinds of excellence should be rewarded. The decisions concerning these rewards should be made at the school level, but they should be of a sufficient size to attract top-caliber students.

Subsequent meetings are now planned.

Speak out on class size!

There's some very fine and interesting statements from Coquitlam teachers already on record. They were made in a submission on learning conditions to the school board in October.

There are five sections in the brief to cover kindergarten, elementary, secondary, classroom construction and library standards. It speaks well for Ray McNab, his learning conditions committee, and the teachers of Coquitlam who took the time to write letters that Ray McNab could use in the brief.

One of these letters is from Ethel Sears, a year one teacher, who says she was 'appalled' with 36 pupils two years before and now has 26. 'I

still feel this is more than one person can handle effectively if the student is to receive much individual attention.'

But she does talk about the changes that she has made this year in seating arrangements, a field trip, parent participation in the classroom and there is, she says, 'an improved tone in the class because each student has received some individual attention. It is a happy learning situation.'

Cheryl Atwater reports on the benefits of a class reduced by seven students, or seven fewer desks. 'With the additional space I was able to set up a larger activity and reading area where children could work on individual or small group activities, without disturbing those who had not finished their assigned work.'

'The effect on teaching time is probably the single most important factor that I have noticed thus far as a result of having a smaller class. I will have more time to give each student.'

Valerie Lutz explains the disappointment she experienced the year before with a class of 34 first year children, when after a 'stimulating summer course' she tried new approaches in the classroom. 'By the end of January I was forced into a rather traditional setting once again.'

This year she has 25 children

and she says she is able to give extra attention to the children who need it, is less crowded and devotes more time to preparing materials. 'I'm looking forward to a good year with no steps backward!' says Valerie Lutz.

Marlene Bell reports that she had returned to teaching after a 10-year retirement period at home to find 39 third grade readers. 'My year fell far short of my expectations.'

This year however she has 18 first year primary students and she is very enthusiastic. In a lengthy letter to the board she explains the changes in physical classroom arrangement, professional development, field trips, arts and crafts, morale for teacher, child and parent, and staff relations.

Hanni Peterson writes, 'As a teacher of first and second year primary, it seems the reality of a workable class size ratio always manifests itself when little hands begin to tug at one's coat tails. These pleas mean "What about me?", "Can I talk to you now?", and "When is it my turn?" And, of course, as numbers increase, so does the ratio of time spent waiting for the teacher. Sometimes it seems only a few get enough individual attention.'

Salmon Arm, cont. from page 2

whereby local boards are held accountable to their community,' Armstrong said in arguing that the system was in fact not working.

Scott Wallace, Social Credit — Oak Bay, expressed surprise when the whole labor management scene was drifting 'albeit reluctantly' toward arbitration, that the committee should be faced with a clear cut request to allow the strike weapon to be given to teachers. I gather, Wallace said, that it would not be mandatory for each district to go ahead and sign a master document but

that there would be the capacity for each district to negotiate fringe benefits locally — Armstrong agreed.

Wallace concluded the hearing by saying that the essential thrust of the BCSTA brief was that the right to strike would make things better. 'We agree that the situation needs to be improved, that nobody has the ideal solution, but the thrust of this, let's just get it clear, is that the right to strike would at least make things better.'

Better than what we have now was the reply.

Trustees blew it

The BCSTA really blew it.

Someone should tell them they missed the point.

The point is not whether or not Dr. Norman Olson's study on class size was scientifically accurate, technically sound, or even legitimate.

It doesn't take a study to figure out the awesome truth that smaller class size makes for a better learning environment. All you have to do is ask any teacher who's ever faced a class of 35 and another of 20.

Someone in the high reaches of the B.C. School Trustees Association wants to backtrack. That's the only solution possible. Watch out, BCSTAers, there's a reactionary in your midst, striving to yank B.C. back to last place educationally amongst the provinces of Canada.

As recently as 1972 B.C.'s pupil ratio was so high that only Newfoundland had a worse ratio.

So, we get a press release from the BCSTA, bombasting Dr. Olson's study on the relationship between class size and learning. You the reader don't know the half of that report, since only a small part of it was quoted in last week's Gazette.

There's more.

Statement: 'Teachers have been told that somehow, there is a connection between smaller classes and student performance. This conclusion is based mainly on the work of Dr. Norman Olson ...'

Rebuttal: For starters no one had to tell the teachers that there is a relationship between smaller classes and student performance. Teachers, whose comprehension is sometimes higher than they're given credit for, figured this out all by themselves, and a long time before Dr. Olson was ever heard of, at that.

FORMER TEACHER STATES

'I have faced classes ranging in size from 38 to 7, and wrestled with the problems inherent in each. While no one's disputing the fact that any size class will have problems, the difference which class size makes is indisputable and amazing.'

'In one of the schools I taught in, approximately half the class was occasionally absent for a religious holiday. Of course, students cut classes so often in that inner-city school that sometimes the class size was manageable simply because of truants (bless 'em).'

'In any case, the first time I experienced one of these religious holidays, I had the eerie sensation that something was wrong ... why were things going so well? Why wasn't there the usual amount of disturbance that 37 high school students create? Why was that shy girl opening up for the first time? Why was our discussion more lively. And, why did I feel so much more at ease and interested myself?

'It wasn't till later that I really could put my finger on the cause ... with a class size of 21, or 22, the whole flavor changed; discussions were easier, hassles minimized.'

'This happened to me again and again, in several different classes and each time, the difference was astounding. Now, granted, a smaller class size certainly does not eliminate problems, it is not a panacea; but I don't think anyone expects it to be.'

'It is simply a step in the right direction. One of many steps forward that I hope to see B.C. take.'

BCSTA report goes on to say that, even if Olson's study were accurate, it may be "irrelevant in B.C."

Now, no one has adequately explained why students in B.C. may be any different in their basic needs than students in the U.S. where Olson carried out his studies. Presumably, we too would like the added individual attention that a smaller class size makes possible.

BCSTA statement: 'the crown on top of the entire issue is worth around \$30 million dollars in taxpayers' money to support a single program that rests on a rather shaky foundation.'

Rebuttal: As mentioned earlier, this 'single program' is a giant step forward; far from resting on a 'shaky foundation', it seems to have the backing of most teachers and parents in B.C. Who cares whether or not Olson's particular study is 'shaky' or firm? The basic soundness of the program to reduce class size is indisputable, and based on common sense and educational experience.

Ask School Superintendent Bill Hawker stated, after he read the report, it seems designed to be 'provocative'. It has provoked at least one Vancouver teacher to write, in a letter to the 'Vancouver Sun' (October 10) 'I now have the time to pay particular attention to more of the individual needs of every student in my classroom ... The BCSTA is seeking to discredit the BCTF's class size campaign.'

For heaven's sake, let us continue to move forward in education in British Columbia. Let's look at other problems, like teacher education (an area which the BCSTA also feels needs improvement, and, it appears, with good reason). But let's not backtrack. Smaller classes are one important step towards a better educational environment in our schools.

