

BCTF action on Anti-Inflation program

Chronology of a protest

On January 14 BCTF representatives met with Deputy Minister of Education, Dr. Walter Hardwick and Jim Bennett, executive assistant to the Minister, to discuss concerns of the membership and request assistance in seeking a meeting with the Cabinet sub-committee on Anti-Inflation. During the meeting Education Minister Pat McGeer joined the group to receive the brief on Teacher Salaries and School Board Budgets (see pages 2 and 3). The meeting was held in Vancouver where Dr. McGeer was attending the Council of Ministers of Education.

October 16 . . .

A special Provincial Agreements Committee meeting was held on October 16-17. Following the Committee's report the Executive Committee on October 17 adopted a number of recommendations. These were distributed to all teachers through their associations by means of a special Agreements Bulletin. Because of the strike of postal workers, special distribution arrangements had to be made. Zone meetings were held.

October 17 . . .

Representatives met with Minister of Education Eileen Dailly on October 17 to express concerns over the inequities and the uncertainties in the federal restraint program.

October 21 . . .

The first of the meetings with other public sector employee groups was held on October 21 to identify common concerns and to co-ordinate action. Subsequent meetings have been held on October 29, November 12, December 17 and January 7.

October 23 . . .

BCTF representatives attended a CTF meeting in Ottawa on October 23 - 24. From representatives at this meeting a brief was prepared and presented by the CTF to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs on November 4.

November 5 . . .

Representatives met with Premier Dave Barrett, Education Minister Eileen Dailly, and Finance Minister Dave Stupich on November 5 and were advised that the Provincial Government intended to participate in the program, and that teachers would be included. However, the government did not know what the actual effect would be of the application of the 'guidelines.'

Representatives were also advised that contrary to information being advanced by the BCSTA, there was no intention of placing a 'guideline' figure restriction on total school board budgets.

November 7 . . .

A meeting was held with officials of the Anti-Inflation Board in Ottawa, on November 7, attended by BCTF and BCSTA representatives, to attempt to clarify aspects of the restraint program. Very little clarification was received. Throughout the meeting BCSTA representatives were seeking definitive answers to permit them to identify a specific figure within which settlements should be made and budgets controlled. Such a figure was not produced.

November 8 . . .

The Provincial Agreements Committee met again on November 8 and after reviewing all information received to that date, reiterated its earlier recommendation that local associations pursue their traditional bargaining objectives through the processes prescribed in the Public Schools Act. It was recognized that in the absence of any clearly defined 'allowable' guideline figures, this course of action would result in almost total arbitration.

November 9 . . .

The Committee's recommendations along with a full report on the information and the rationale on which they were based were to be communicated by the co-ordinators to all the local association agreements chairpersons by telephone or zone meetings. The Executive Committee endorsed these recommendations via a conference call on November 9.

November 10 . . .

On November 10, a telegram jointly prepared by the BCTF and the BCSTA was sent by the BCTF to the Deputy Minister of Education advising him that neither party was in a position to interpret the federal legislation at this time, and that the staff of the Anti-Inflation Board had indicated, in the meeting on November 7, that teachers and trustees in B.C. would have to solve their problems as best they could within the legislation available to them in B.C.

This action was taken as a result of the Deputy-Minister's telegram of November 6 to conciliators advising them to contact the BCTF or BCSTA for an interpretation of the federal guidelines.

Also on November 10, a letter was sent to Premier Barrett advising him of the result of the meeting with the officials of the Anti-Inflation Board, and of the recommendations of the Agreements Committee.

November 12 . . .

At the same time as they concurred with the joint telegram to the Deputy Minister, the BCSTA sent a telephone message to all school boards stating that information they received at the meeting with Federal Government representatives indicated among other things that increments may be included in the guidelines, and that school boards and officers of school boards paying in excess of the guidelines would be subject to prosecution notwithstanding the existence of an agreement or arbitration award to the contrary.

This message of false alarm, reinforced by a telegram of November 12 to all conciliators of similar substance from an official of the Department of Education, effectively stopped most of the negotiations that were still going on.

November 14 . . .

After telephone representation from the BCTF pointing out the inappropriateness and the error in the Department's telegram of

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Dr. Pat McGeer, Minister of Education

The British Columbia Teachers' Federation welcomes this opportunity to discuss a specific problem with you — namely the federal restraint program. Because our members have many other concerns, however, we ask that a subsequent meeting be arranged today at which time we can submit a full brief to you and establish a process whereby we can work toward a mutually satisfactory solution to our problems.

On the federal restraint program we have two major topics for clarification — teacher salaries and school board budgets.

Teacher Salaries

1. Sixty of the 78 teacher bargaining units in this province have had their salaries for 1976 set by salary arbitration boards. The other 18 bargaining units either negotiated a settlement or were on continuing contracts. Because 17 districts were involved in zonal negotiations this year, only 46 salary arbitration boards were required.

2. Section 142(3) of the Public Schools Act states: An award of a salary arbitration board under this Act is final and binding on the Board and association to which it applies, and where the Board has established salaries and bonuses, or prepared and adopted salary schedules, the salaries, bonuses and schedules shall be adjusted in accordance with the award.

3. We hold that nothing short of an act of the Provincial Legislative Assembly can change the fact that the salaries and bonuses as contained in the arbitration award and / or as negotiated between the two parties must be paid effective January 1, 1976.

4. We have advised our members of this fact and we expect school boards to obey the law as it applies to them. We have advised our members not to participate in any scheme of accepting only partial payment as of January 31 because this would be in contravention of the Public Schools Act.

5. Traditionally teachers have taken the position that they are an integral part of the community in which they work and are entitled to share in its wealth. The contribution of teachers to the economic growth of the province may be somewhat less tangible than that of the logger or fisherman but it is no less real.

We have taken as a starting point the principle first enunciated by the Economic Council of Canada in 1966:

In all cases where the government is the immediate or the ultimate employer, the objective of policy should be to maintain as close a relationship as possible with wages, salaries, and other benefits paid by good employers in the private sector. This relationship should be maintained on a current basis, without the excessive delays and procrastination which have often occurred in the past, resulting in dissatisfaction,

loss of efficiency, and an eventual need for unusually large wage and salary adjustments.

We have seen evidence that this principle has been accepted by federal, provincial and municipal governments.

It is particularly important that the principle be applied to teachers because we are a group of public sector employees who presently bargain within a restricted scope and who have accepted compulsory, binding arbitration as the basis for final settlement of our salaries.

We contend that over the years teachers have followed the wage settlements of other large employee groups in British Columbia but always a year in arrears. This last point is most significant. The fact that we follow, a year later, always works to our disadvantage in that any slowing down of the rate of wage increases is reflected in our wage rates immediately. In short, we have always bargained in a climate of restraint. And this is not to mention the additional real restraints of education finance formulae.

Please refer to Appendices 1 and 2 for two examples of how teacher settlements follow other groups and how an average 12.5% (preliminary) scale increase for 1976 compares to what others will be receiving in 1976. (The weighted average is 12.14% preliminary.)

BCTF membership willing to accept guidelines with inequities removed

6. Teachers are well aware of the call by Prime Minister Trudeau that all Canadians should adhere to the spirit of the guidelines. Our membership has stated a willingness to accept guidelines but with inequities removed.

The proposals to arbitration boards reflected this revised thinking on the part of teachers.

That salary arbitration boards definitely took the Prime Minister's call into consideration is shown by the following extracts from awards:

(a) 'The spirit of the program has, however, been taken into account in the finalization of the award.' (Fernie)

(b) 'To treat the evidence before us without regard to the federal legislation would be to ignore reality.' (North Thompson)

(c) 'The board must obviously be influenced by the guidelines set up under the Anti-Inflation Act.' (Abbotsford)

(d) 'The board cannot ignore the existence of this legislation.' (Mission)

(e) 'The board has been influenced by the federal guidelines on wage control.' (Burns Lake)

Thus teachers have already paid the price for 'restraint.' The economic evidence would have dictated settlements and awards at an average of about 18 percent. Instead, some associations are looking at awards that are less than the current increase in the Consumer Price Index.

TEACHER SALARIES AND SCHOOL BOARD BUDGETS

Submission to:
The Honourable Patrick McGeer
Minister of Education
Government of British Columbia

On Behalf of:
The British Columbia Teachers' Federation

Recommendation

We recommend that if your government does enact legislation to bring public sector employees in British Columbia under the federal wage restraint program that you exercise your right under Section 4(3) of the Anti-Inflation Act to enter into an agreement with terms specific to British Columbia, that these terms recognize the restraints under which teachers have always negotiated and which have already been applied in 1976 contracts, and that no additional restraints be imposed with respect to these 1976 contracts.

School Board Budgets

1. The Federal Anti-Inflation Program guidelines do not apply to school board budgets. However the second element of the guidelines as contained in the policy paper 'Attack on Inflation' is relevant in determining an applicable spirit of the anti-inflation program to school board budgets; 'Government expenditure policies aimed at limiting the growth of public expenditures and the rate of increase of public service employment.' The Federal Policy Statement goes on to describe the manner in which the Federal Government intends to accomplish this limitation of employment — a 1.5% increase in 1976-77 employment over 1975-76. The statement also notes 'unavoidable and desirable increases' in the Post Office, the penitentiaries, the RCMP and elsewhere.

For the B.C. public school system, we consider that increases in teacher employment are both 'unavoidable and desirable' if the quality of our system is to be maintained and any semblance of equality of educational opportunity is to be achieved.

2. It is important to recognize that there is no arbitrary percentage increase in cost recommended in the Anti-Inflation program. The guideline for businesses setting prices is that increases in prices should not exceed increases in costs. For school boards there have been unavoidable increases in the costs of teacher salaries, heating and maintenance, materials, supplies, etc. Any arbitrary

percentage limitation on increases in school board budgets would affect school boards unequally as they face different cost increases depending on enrollment changes, changes in the composition of the teaching force, geographic region and other factors. An arbitrary limitation would also be inconsistent with the guidelines for business enterprises and for limiting public service employment. In extreme cases it might lead to unemployment which is contrary to the objectives of the program.

3. For most of the period 1952-1972 B.C. experienced a rapid rate of increase in school enrollments. The rate of increase was high by historical standards and was by far the highest in Canada. This rapid increase in enrollment placed tremendous pressure on school board operating budgets and school construction programs. Despite large increases in provincial grants to school districts, B.C. fell behind Canadian norms for class sizes, pupil/teacher ratios and school facilities. The school construction freezes created a backlog of hundreds of millions of dollars of necessary school construction. In addition special education and remedial services were inadequate, libraries were substandard and many districts did not offer public kindergartens.

Slower rate of enrollment increase permitted translation of increased expenditures into improved school services

4. During the last three years, the rate of enrollment increase had slowed considerably and this trend of slower rates of increase is expected to continue for the next few years, although the pattern is not uniform throughout the province. The slower rate of enrollment increase permitted the translation of increased expenditures into improved school services. Class sizes were reduced, libraries improved, special education services expanded, kindergartens provided in all districts and hundreds of millions of dollars for school construction authorized.

The improved services were achieved with an increase in provincial funds consistent with the overall growth of the provincial economy but far below the rate of increase in most government departments.

The current state of financial support for B.C.

public schools is that per pupil expenditures are at the Canadian average despite generally higher costs. In relation to income per person B.C. still spends less per pupil than any other province in Canada. Within the province there are immense inequalities in services from district to district. In many cases students with special educational needs; for example, those from non-English speaking families, not only receive no compensatory school services but are faced with learning conditions far below present provincial norms.

Thousands of primary students are in classes too large for adequate student progress

While class sizes are generally lower, many very large classes remain. Thousands of primary students are in classes too large for adequate student progress. These injustices can only be rectified by increases in school board budgets above the level to maintain current services.

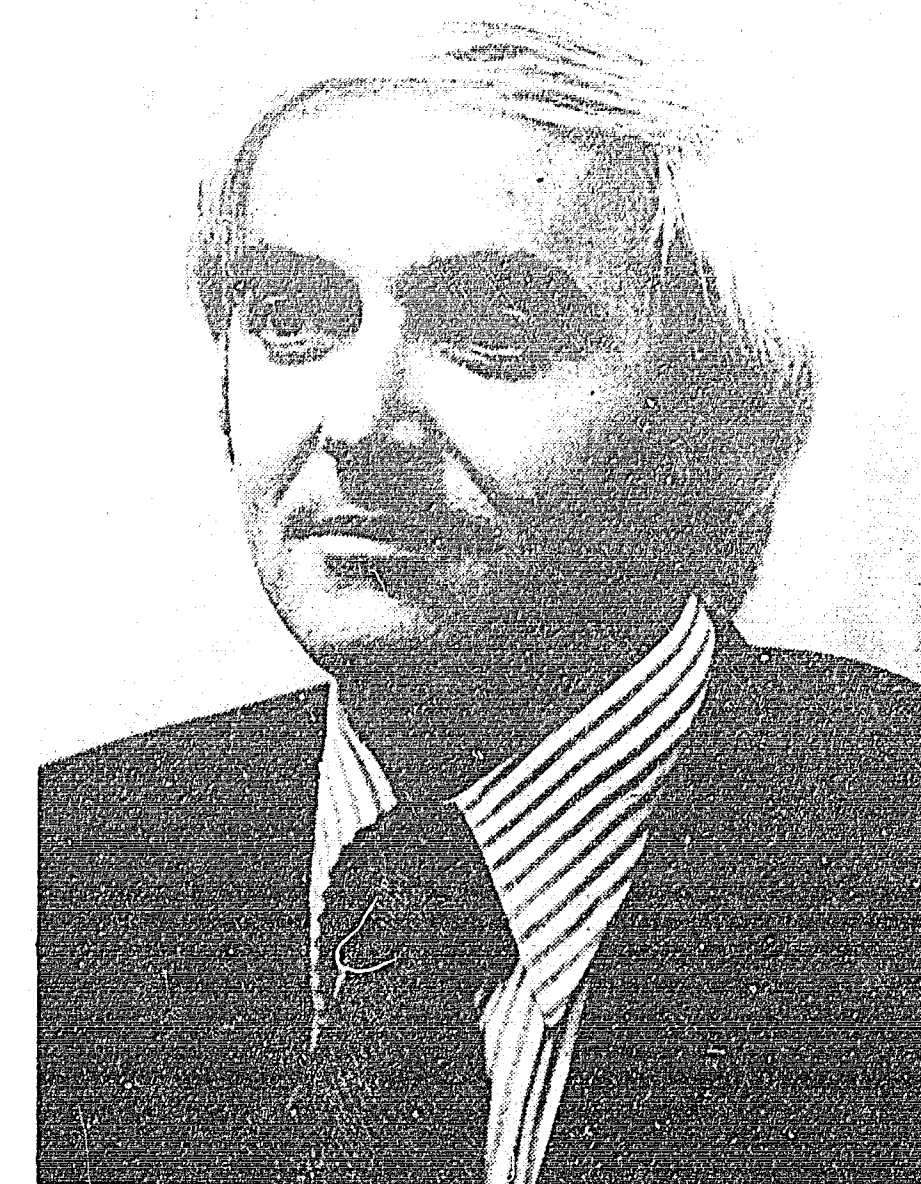
5. The concern for controlling cost is as great among local school trustees as among members of the Provincial Government. However local trustees are in a better position to balance the cost of programs and their benefits in meeting student and community needs than the provincial authority. That is why it is so important for school boards to have the autonomy to determine the amount of non-shareable operating expense without arbitrary or artificial provincial constraints.

6. The public is concerned not only with the cost but also the quality of public school services; with the efficiency and productivity of delivery of school services and with the management of the school system.

Today's parents demand that the school meet the personal, physical, social, emotional and creative, as well as the intellectual needs of their children. The benefits that flow to a society that meets these needs are social, spiritual and economic. These needs cannot be met in large classes or in schools lacking in learning materials or specialized instructional and support services. Even the narrowly defined economic return on the public 'investment' in a well-educated population justifies increased school board expenditures.

It follows that increases in 'educational productivity' cannot be achieved by increasing class size or reducing the amount and variety of instructional materials and supplies. However the management of the school system can be significantly improved by a greater emphasis on long-range planning.

The public will receive greater value for its educational expenditures by replacing the short-term crash programs alternating with freezes and cutbacks that have characterized the B.C. school system over the past three decades with stable, well-planned programs.



Bill Broadley, President, BCTF

In the difficult economic circumstances we now face, a slower pace of improvement is indicated, but improvement nevertheless. Any regression or deterioration in services, even of a temporary nature, would be disastrous for morale and inimical to the development of a stable, well-planned approach to school district management and administration.

7. For this year all school boards require increases in provincial grants to cover the cost of maintaining the 1975 level of services. In addition most school boards need increased funds to upgrade substandard aspects of their school programs. Some school boards require increased funds to relieve local taxpayers of unfair burdens arising from inadequacies in the educational finance formula.

8. This fall a joint committee consisting of representatives of the Department of Education, the B.C. School Trustees Association and the B.C. Teachers' Federation completed an examination of public school educational finance. The Committee identified inadequacies in the finance formula and made the following recommendations:

(a) That the basis for calculating elementary school IUs (instructional units) be changed from one IU for 25 elementary pupils to one for 20 elementary pupils.

(b) That there be one additional IU for each school.

(c) That there be an inflation factor for regular increases in the value of the instructional unit.

(d) That assessments be equalized in all districts.

The first two recommendations have already been implemented. (The other two recommendations require changes in legislation.) The increase in the value of the instructional unit announced December 1, 1975 was 5.4%. The cumulative effect of the changes announced would be to increase the basic education program about 25% overall with a range of about 22% to 30% depending on the nature of the school district. These amendments are necessary, desirable and long overdue.

Implementation of the remaining recommendations, extension of the school property tax removal program, and utilization of supplementary and special aid grants to districts with special needs or problems would facilitate efficient management of a progressively improving school system.

Recommendation

We recommend that your government not impose any arbitrary limits on provincial sharing of educational expenditures or on local school board budgets.

Respectfully submitted,
G. W. Broadley, President
R. M. Buzza, General Secretary

This special issue outlines efforts made by BCTF representatives supporting teachers' protests of their inequitable position under the federal price and wage controls

CHRONOLOGY — Continued

November 12 to the conciliators, the Deputy Minister issued a further telegram to the conciliators on November 14 which stated 'Disregard comment re penalties and prosecution as the Department is not the body to make this interpretation . . . Regulations on guidelines not known at this time.'

November 20 . . .

On November 14, the Anti-Inflation Board issued a bulletin on 'anniversary date' increases. This was immediately interpreted by the BCSTA to mean that teacher increments were to be included as a cost factor in any allowable guideline increase. The BCTF was not able to derive such an interpretation. The Anti-Inflation Board was asked through the Minister of Education's office for clarification, and on November 20 sent a telegram to the Minister stating that the matter of 'increments in a salary structure of defined steps where progression is dependent on lengths of relevant experience' would be dealt with later.

November 27 . . .

On November 27, the BCTF advised the Minister of Education that it condemned the action of the Department of Education officials who issued to conciliators nonfactual statements relating to the federal wage and price guidelines.

December 1 . . .

On December 1, the BCTF advised the President of the BCSTA of its extreme disapproval of the nonfactual information distributed to conciliators and the public (by the BCSTA) in regard to the federal wage and price guidelines.

December 2-29 . . .

During December, 46 salary arbitration boards met to determine the salaries and bonuses for 60 bargaining units. The trustee position was federal guidelines; the teacher position was economic evidence as tempered by teacher restraint within the spirit of the guideline program.

Arbitration awards ranged from 10.2% to 14.7% on scale, with a simple average of just over 12%. Many of the arbitration boards in their reasons indicated that the award was influenced by the federal restraint announcement.

December 23 . . .

On December 23, a meeting was requested with Dr. Pat McGeer, Minister of Education, to discuss the federal wage restraint program.

January 2 . . .

On January 2, Dr. McGeer issued a news release which stated in part: 'The Hon. Pat McGeer, Minister of Education, announced today that the new government of British Columbia has initiated no change in the policy of the previous government in respect to the federal Anti-Inflation program in its relationship to educational salaries.'

Following this announcement BCTF representatives contacted Dr. McGeer to protest the process used in making the announcement without prior consultation and emphasized the need for a meeting as requested December 23.

January 5 . . .

On January 5, 1976, the BCSTA requested co-operation of the BCTF in implementing arbitration awards by putting the differ-

ence between the award and their interpretation of the 'guidelines' in escrow until the anticipated legislation placing B.C. teachers under the restraint program becomes effective.

January 6 . . .

On January 6, the BCTF advised the BCSTA that its proposal of January 5 was unacceptable because to be party to withholding a portion of an arbitration award would constitute a conspiracy to seek to subvert the Public Schools Act and would provide a cause of action to any teacher or association adversely affected by such conspiracy.

On January 6, the BCTF in a letter to the Deputy Minister of Education again requested an early meeting with the Minister on the matter of teacher salaries and school board budgets.

January 8 . . .

On January 8 the BCTF requested of the Anti-Inflation Board that should they become involved in reviewing any teacher contracts in B.C., no public statements be made by the Board prior to discussion with both the parties to the contracts, i.e., teachers and trustees as represented by the BCTF and the BCSTA.

January 9 . . .

On January 9, the Executive Committee approved a brief to the Minister of Education on teacher salaries and school board budgets. Further, the Executive Committee approved the following motions:

- 'Members are advised not to participate in any scheme of withholding full payment of salaries as this would be in contravention of the Public Schools Act.'*
- 'Local associations are advised to notify the BCTF office if any school board refuses to abide by the terms of a negotiated or arbitrated salary agreement for 1976 and that the General Secretary be authorized to approve support of such representative legal actions as may be necessary to enforce the agreements.'*

January 12 . . .

A BCTF News was issued on January 12 which said in part: 'There are 78 individual bargaining units in the province. There cannot be a single precise magic figure, such as the 10% implied in the Minister of Education's statement, that could apply equally and equitably to each of them. When or if there is law placing B.C. teachers under the federal restraint program, the settlement or award for each bargaining unit would have to be considered separately, unless the government proposes a completely arbitrary control.'

It may well be that, given the kinds of calculations and exceptions provided for in the Federal Act and Regulations, each of the settlements and arbitration awards can be shown to be well within the guidelines, with some having paid a higher price than might have been necessary.'

Contrary to reports from government ministers in Victoria, there is no provision in the Anti-Inflation Act or its Regulations for automatic roll-back or recovery of monies paid in excess of guidelines.

January 13 . . .

BCTF representatives again requested a meeting with Education Minister McGeer.