

BCTF Newsletter

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SEPTEMBER 19, 1979

Language question goes to RA

Anglophone Catholic teachers of Quebec are appealing to their teaching colleagues across Canada to assist them in their resistance to the language-of-instruction sections of Quebec's Charter of the French Language (Bill 101).

The appeal comes from the Provincial Association of Catholic Teachers, representing about 4,000 teachers in Quebec's publicly financed English-language Catholic schools.

The BCTF Executive Committee decided at its June meeting to ask the Representative Assembly in October to approve a contribution of up to \$1 per BCTF member to PACT.

The debate on this recommendation will give geographical representatives a chance to hear first-hand how the language charter has affected education in Quebec.

Robert Dobie, secretary-general of PACT, will attend the RA at BCTF expense to make his appeal in person. The 6,200-member Provincial Association of Protestant Teachers and the much-larger Centrale de l'Enseignement du Quebec have also been invited to send representatives. Patricia English, president of the Canadian Teachers' Federation which has been watching the Quebec situation closely, will also be on hand.

PACT has been in trouble with its members' school boards and with the provincial government because of its refusal to accept the restrictions imposed by Bill 101.

In essence, the charter bans children of migrants from other provinces and immigrants from other countries from receiving instruction in Anglophone schools.

Only children who were already being

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The big issue



Some call it declining enrolment. Others say it should be called education cutbacks. Under any name, it's the big issue facing teachers.

These children, learning English in a special class in Vancouver, are a persuasive argument that there are many unmet educational needs in our communi-

ties. Vancouver School Board chairperson Nathan Divinsky sees falling enrolment as a chance to chop the payroll. The BCTF's position, that declining enrolment lets us improve services without adding to costs, gets support from a UBC professor.

See stories on pages 4 and 5.

Major pensions study has some surprises

Retirement is very different from what teachers expect

There's a big difference between a teacher's expectations about retirement and the reality, a BCTF study has revealed.

The survey, undertaken jointly by the BCTF and the Retired Teachers' Association and carried out last year by Paterson, Cook Limited, shows that a retired teacher would generally rather have worked a few more years, but is all the same happier in retirement than an active teacher expects to be.

The Survey and Analysis of Expenditures, Incomes and Perceptions of Active and Retired Teachers in B.C. completed in May, compares the expectations of 286 active teachers aged 50 to 65 and the experiences of 249 retired teachers.

Regardless of age, retired teachers said they would rather have retired later than they did. While only 11 per cent of active teachers expect health to be a factor in timing of their retirement, in fact 25 per cent of retired teachers found that poor health dictated early retirement.

Almost half the active teachers thought they would find some kind of work after retiring, but in fact only 9 per cent of retired teachers have jobs.

On the other hand, 47 per cent of retired teachers consider government-sponsored pensions and benefits adequate. Only 38 per cent of active teachers expect them to be so.

Eighty per cent of active teachers expect retired life to be satisfying, but in

fact 91 per cent of retired teachers said they were satisfied or more than satisfied.

One active teacher in three surveyed did not know the Teachers' Pension Plan is indexed to the cost of living.

The survey was carried out to get information on income, saving and expenditure patterns of teachers either retired or close to retiring, and to learn their opinions on the adequacy of their incomes and living conditions.

"This is going to give us a much firmer base to negotiate with the government on the pension plan," says Bert Wales, coordinator for the Retired Teachers' Association in the survey. "It strengthens the BCTF hand in dealing with the government, because it's based on fact, not just on opinion."

The survey shows the need for better retirement planning, and the need for better informing active teachers of what their pension plans provide.

"Teachers unduly fear retirement, and they have some unrealistic thoughts about what's going to happen," Wales

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Chalk Talk

BCTF staffer Jim Bowman launches our new opinion column

At about 10:30 a.m. on Friday, July 6, I almost fell into the B.C. Legislative Assembly. Imagine the consternation and headlines that would have provoked. Two hundred pounds (820,000 kilograms) of BCTF staffer, all beer and blubber, splattering all over the hon. members. BCTF orders kamikaze attack on Sacred backbenchers.

Let me explain what I was doing on a hot Friday afternoon perched precariously in the members' gallery some 20 feet (820,000 metres) above the playpen. I was

listening to the Hon. Mr. McGeer introduce the financial estimates of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.

Now the Hon. Mr. McGeer and this dishon. reporter long ago agreed to differ as to the purpose of public education. I happen to think he knows next to nothing about educating the great unwashed and he hasn't seemed to have taken any notice of what I've said on the odd occasion I've attempted to tell him how to do his job. Politically we're poles apart. I vote for



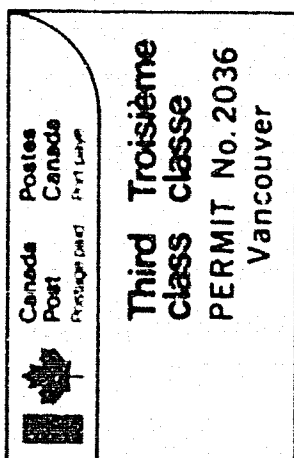
Henri of Navarre and am recorded anonymously as a spoiled ballot; presumably he votes for himself and gets counted along with all the other sheep. (That must be hard on him.)

As far as I can tell we have nothing in common but a liking for the grape (even there he's an oenophile and I'll drink anything from Algerian plonk to Kettle Valley shoe polish) and the fact that we both wish to reform the education system. Although, in my admittedly prejudiced view, I want to reform it forward and he wants to reform it back.

So there I was dutifully earning my keep, only 95 per cent of my attention meandering around thoughts of "beaded bubbles winking at the brim," the other 5 per cent admiring the style of hon. minister. I have to admit that he is a very effective debater: thumps desks as to the

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IF UNDELIVERED, return to 2235 Burrard St., Vancouver, B.C. V6J 3H9



Industry shows way for teachers' pay

Teachers have no reason to be scared off from seeking an increase like that granted to workers in the forest industry. The B.C. economy is not still struggling to recover from a recession. All the basic industries such as forestry, mining, fishing, manufacturing, transportation and tourism have had two excellent sales and profit years. Even the once-ailing construction industry is showing signs of prosperity.

The poor relative value of the dollar in international money markets cannot be taken as a sign of gloom. That discount is a positive measure of the competitive edge enjoyed by B.C. producers in foreign markets.

The world shortage of energy falls rather more lightly on Canadians, particularly those in the West, than on all our major trading partners. This means the energy costs for both manufacture and transportation of goods are lower, again giving us a competitive edge.

There is no basis for the claim that taxpayers cannot afford to continue to meet escalating tax rates. Firstly, there has recently been some reduction at the municipal level of those rates. Secondly, increasing production and profits in the basic industries which form the foundation of the B.C. economy mean increasing revenues for government and increasing incomes for taxpayers.

Unless some part of the system is not working, there is an increasing ability to pay on the part of all taxpayers. Finally the notion that those who serve

the public through governmental agencies should take less as poor cousins in our economic set-up is a totally unacceptable idea. If industrial workers deserve a 12 per cent increase, then so do those who serve the educational needs of their children.

—Jurd Kirby
Economic Welfare Division

Parents' leave gains sought this year

One of the Agreements Committee recommendations adopted by the Executive Committee as an objective in this year's bargaining is an adequate maternity/parenthood leave clause.

Only 12 districts now have such clauses in contract, and not all of these provide the kind of flexibility of choice considered desirable.

School boards have traditionally been reluctant to accept these clauses into contract, on the argument that they are not negotiable, or that the basic leave guarantees are already in the Maternity Protection Act. But the act does not provide for long-term leave for either parent who may want the time at home in the critical early development years of the child.

Many boards are beginning to realize

that a good clause provides for orderly, non-contentious administration of a socially desirable leave, while providing teachers with job security in exchange for their undertaking of important social responsibilities.

—Mike Midzain
Economic Welfare Division

Raises average 10.8 per cent

The strongest evidence for teacher salary bargaining this year is found in the private sector.

Teacher negotiators will be using 1979 industrial settlements representing some 75,000 workers whose average increase is near 11 per cent. These industries (see table) represent a cross-section of the workers in most communities in B.C.

Journeyman Wage Increases			
	Number Workers	1979 Increases (percentage)	1980 Increases (percentage)
IWA	38,000	11.4	9.5
Pulp and Paper	13,000	11.4	9.5
Cominco	4,800	10.6	10.5
Teamsters	4,000	9.7	10.4
Longshoremen	4,000	11.1	8.6
Pacific Press	1,300	11.01	10.1
Supermarkets	9,300	10.5	8.6
AVERAGE		10.8*	9.6*

*Plus COLA clause

These contracts represent the first real bargaining in the private sector since the Anti-Inflation Board closed shop. They are based on the buoyant prosperity of the B.C. economy and provide the pattern for wage settlements to follow.

—Ken Smith
Economic Welfare Division

BCTF against UIC changes

BCTF president Al Blakey has added the federation's voice to the chorus of protests from employee groups against suggested changes in the unemployment insurance program.

Blakey sent the following telegram to Employment and Immigration Minister Ron Atkey:

"The B.C. Teachers' Federation, representing 28,000 teachers, categorically opposes any suggestion that unemployment insurance payments to sick or pregnant workers be reduced or eliminated.

"This federation operates a wage-loss replacement program which is financed in part by the teachers' share of the reduced contributions to the unemployment insurance fund which this plan permits school boards to make. Elimination of UIC sickness benefits without a corresponding reduction in premiums would place this plan in jeopardy.

"UIC maternity benefits should be made more readily available and should be extended to cover adoptions, rather than being eliminated.

"The unemployment insurance fund is heavily subsidized by teachers and their employers; benefits received by teachers are only a small fraction of the total premiums paid. However, we are prepared to continue this subsidy in the interests of maintaining a socially desirable wage-replacement program.

"We suggest your government direct its energies to developing a healthy economy rather than devising ways to inflict new hardships on those already at a disadvantage."

Ralph Sundby situation still up in air

The status of reinstated BCTF staff member Ralph Sundby is still unclear.

After long debate at its September 14-15 meeting, the Executive Committee put off until September 29 a decision on whether Sundby's performance should be reassessed. Meanwhile he is on payroll but not on duty.

Sundby was fired last January. He was reinstated after a review panel concluded that his firing had been legal but inappropriate.

In reinstating Sundby at its August 23 meeting, the executive did not specify whether his performance was to be subject to further review.

The review panel had proposed that Sundby be given clarification of his responsibilities and duties and "undergo a fresh working test period in the job."

The federation's solicitors advised the executive that Sundby should now be given "a proper performance review based on proper criteria..."

They said reinstatement should restore Sundby to the position he was in immediately before his firing. To give him a continuing appointment now, without further review, would be to put him in a better position than that.

At the executive's September 14-15 meeting, President Al Blakey argued that to re-subject Sundby to a review process that the review panel had found to be inadequate would place Sundby in a worse position than before his termination.

He said Sundby should start work as planned on September 17 with the understanding that his performance might be reviewed later if there were complaints about his work.

General Secretary Bob Buzzza argued that Sundby's status must be clarified before he resumed his duties.

Executive member Tom Krall moved that Sundby undergo a "working test period in the job", that his duties and

responsibilities be clarified to him in writing; that his assessment period run from October, 1979 to June 30, 1980; and that the general secretary make a recommendation to the Executive Committee as to Sundby's continuation or termination.

A motion by Blakey to postpone consideration of Krall's motion until September 29 passed by a recorded vote of 6-5: Blakey, Coplin, Cornes, Eastman, Kuehn and Norman in favor; Brady, Galinski, Krall, Retallick and Smart opposed.

Past President Pat Brady then gave notice of a motion asking the general secretary to prepare recommendations for the executive's November 2-3 meeting to give effect to the review panel's advice that Sundby be given a "fresh working test period" and the lawyers' advice that this be followed by a new performance review.

It was agreed that Sundby would not report for duty until the executive has dealt with the matter again at its September 29 meeting.

At that meeting Blakey and First Vice-President Larry Kuehn will propose that

no staff assessments be carried out until the executive and the Professional Staff Association have worked out new assessment procedures.

Under the Blakey/Kuehn plan, all administrative staff except those on term appointments would be granted continuing appointments immediately and would be subject to assessment only if doubts arise about their competence.

Buzzza came under questioning by executive member Lynda Coplin for mailing to geographical representatives a memo to the Executive Committee in which he urged clarification of Sundby's status and gave his opinion that it should be considered probationary.

Blakey and other executive members defended Buzzza's right and obligation to call their attention to questions about the implications of their decisions. Any final-draft memo to the executive automatically goes to the GRs.

Blakey said, however, that Buzzza's memo should not have been attached, as it was, to copies of the review panel's report. Buzzza said it was not his intention that the two documents be stapled together.

Experiment at LC course earns raves

The BCTF's Learning Conditions Division experimented with a major shift in training procedures this year, one that is expected to result in a more effective learning conditions program.

Teacher volunteers in the persons of regional co-ordinators conducted all the workshops during this year's short course for learning conditions chairpersons August 24 to 26 in Vernon and earned highly supportive reviews of their performance.

Just as important, the workshop leaders, who worked in pairs to cover six major thrusts of the LC program over the three-day conference, expressed satisfaction with the experience. The comments ranged from a feeling of some inadequacy to "fantastic experience" and "excellent process."

These reactions were reinforced by participants who overwhelmingly rated content and presentation as "excellent" or "good." Written evaluations included: "Hurray for small class (workshop) sizes! And for team teaching! And small group discussions. Great idea to have co-ordinators teach. . . . Co-ordinators expended a great deal of effort to be well prepared and helpful." The co-ordinators were involved in an intensive two-day training session in preparation for the short course, funded by a Labor Canada grant.

The six workshops, involving more than 90 participants, examined the Learning Conditions Statistics Handbook, school board budgets, case preparation and presentation techniques, school needs assessment with the emphasis on special student needs, techniques for resisting layoffs, and an understanding of the BCTF grievance procedure in relation to enforcing the declaration of basic learning and working conditions rights, prerogatives and obligations.

The workshops, organized in regional

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Procedural "screwup" probed

The BCTF Executive Committee wants a report on procedures that led to what one member called "a colossal screwup" over the appointment of a B.C. representative to the CTF Status of Women Committee.

The story, as it emerged through questioning of Past President Pat Brady by executive member Lynda Coplin at the executive's September 14-15 meeting, was this:

At its June meeting the BCTF executive agreed to submit, without endorsement, the name of Heather Knapp for membership on the CTF committee.

However, it was agreed that any outgoing or incoming member of the BCTF executive could submit additional names for CTF consideration, through the B.C. directors of CTF.

An unnamed executive member gave the name of Norma Mercer to Peter Minshall, then one of the B.C. directors.

Knapp's name was on the original CTF shortlist for the committee. But the CTF shortlisting committee replaced it with Mercer's name before submitting the list

to the CTF board of directors. Mercer was then appointed. No reason was given for the change.

Coplin told the executive she was "extremely angry" and embarrassed by what had happened.

Her persistent questioning led Brady, one of the two B.C. directors, to object that he was being subjected to "almost a cross-examination."

Gerry Retallick, who had substituted for Tom Krall, the other B.C. director, at the CTF appointment session, also objected. It was being insinuated, he said, that "there was something less than honest going on." He said there was "nothing under the table"; names had been submitted in accordance with procedures agreed to by the executive.

The executive passed a motion by Doug Smart calling for a report from the B.C. directors and recommendations on the process used to nominate BCTF members to CTF committees.

This was passed with an amendment proposed by Steve Norman calling for details on Mercer's appointment and changes in the CTF shortlist and procedures.

In earlier business the executive approved an addition of two members to the BCTF Status of Women Committee (for a total of nine), and a budget increase of \$1,400 to cover their expenses.



Marguerite McAfee, learning assistance teacher at Lord Roberts school, chooses lesson aid with help from BCTF staffer Nancy Storey. The BCTF Lesson Aids Service offers 700 curriculum-oriented materials, most of them developed by teachers. Prices range from 5 cents to \$185, and teachers can visit Lesson Aids at BCTF building (open six days a week) or order by mail with help of catalogue available in every school.

Welcome new teachers'

This statement about the placement of teachers in their first year of teaching after certification has been approved by both the BCTF and the B.C. School Trustees' Association.

The importance of the first year's experience for teachers cannot be overstressed. Many mistakes both of omission and commission could be avoided if teachers new to the profession were welcomed, informed, placed in suitable positions and given appropriate advice and encouragement.

First-year teachers should be given assignments within their area of expertise and training. Unless they are extremely well-qualified or unless very exceptional circumstances prevail, they should not be assigned to teach in kindergarten or

Grade 1, take counselling or learning assistance positions, or take responsibility for classes that contain children suffering from severe learning disabilities or behavioral problems.

If it can be avoided, first-year teachers should not be assigned to split classes, nor should they be given work involving a large number of subjects or grades.

It would be of help to first-year teachers if a system of advice and assistance was established, involving district staff, principals and experienced colleagues. Extra days for in-service work and for visiting the classrooms of experienced teachers working on similar assignments are recommended. Orientation sessions have proved helpful in districts where they have been initiated.

School boards and local associations of teachers can both play an important part in making the first year of experience for teachers a rewarding and challenging one.

Letters

Stop being satisfied with a little bit less

At the Agreements Short Course this summer we went over salary figures which compare teacher earnings with other employee earnings. I was shocked to find how far we have fallen behind.

For example, in 1961 a beginning PC teacher (category 4/0) earned \$4,300 while a beginning mill worker earned \$3,900. In 1969 the teacher earned \$6,260, and the beginning mill worker earned \$6,380. Now, in 1979, the teacher starts at \$15,000 but the unskilled mill worker takes home \$18,000.

Teachers with a PA (category 6) have also fallen behind. In 1961 the beginning teacher made \$5,100 while the journeyman earned \$5,160. Today, the teacher starts at \$18,300 while the journeyman earns \$23,400.

If you believe — as I did — that those increments finally help you to catch up in lifetime earnings, sorry, not so. And it is even worse if you consider those 4 or 5 or 6 years of university fees and lost earnings.

Now I am a solid supporter of unions and I do not believe that teachers are "better" than other workers. What I do believe is that teachers have as much right to a fair salary as anyone else.

It is time we stop being satisfied (or only slightly annoyed) when we get "just a little bit less than the going rate." We can-

not afford to keep on taking settlements that put us further behind each year.

It's time we demand a fair salary for a hard year's work.

Don Walmsley
Boston Bar
Member of the
Provincial Agreements Committee

It's a sticky business

Thank you for your article on the Educational Research Institute of B.C.'s learning assistance study ("LAs feel underused," May 24).

Unfortunately, the sticky business of reporting research findings in a brief, straightforward fashion can be a lot like trying to get scotch tape off the wall. In the articles I gave you to work from, I'd probably left some tape on the wall. In your article a bit of the paint came off with the tape.

The line "... classroom teachers tend to seek advice or assistance in dealing with the children with learning disabilities only ..." should read "... in dealing with exceptional children only ..."

"Learning assistance teachers feel that consultation and working with classroom

teachers is more important than direct instruction to students ..." should say "... than most of their other tasks ..."

Finally, the headline implies or connotes that LAs are underworked. Based on the findings of the study, the project director would contend that LAs are overworked although wrongly used in many instances.

Julia Ellis
Communications Co-ordinator
ERIBC

Rembrandt has a good deal

I am writing this letter in the interest of economy and I should stress that it is completely unsolicited.

When the RA members stayed at the Rembrandt Hotel some years ago I was impressed with the staff. Since that time I have gone back to this hotel while in Vancouver for workshops.

It is the only hotel I have found which (1) gives a discount to teachers on business, and (2) extends a discount to teachers who are in Vancouver for other reasons and will accept BCTF membership as a reason to extend a reduced room rate at any time.

Recently I paid \$24. By way of comparison, the Holiday Inn on West Broadway, which "hosts" the

ECA conferences, does not give a deduction for teachers attending these conferences. The last time I checked their room rate was \$32.

If teachers are going to be in Vancouver, I would certainly recommend registering as a BCTF member at the Rembrandt Hotel. It may just save you, your in-service fund, or your school district a few dollars.

Bob Chown
R.R. #20
Courtenay

No more for IYC?

As a parent and a concerned teacher, I find it personally disappointing that out of a total BCTF budget of \$5,518,049 we are providing only \$6,000 in grants for IYC. This works out to be .0010873 per cent of the total budget.

I feel it is time the BCTF took a leadership role in regards to the rights and needs of children in this, the International Year of the Child. IYC provides a time when the BCTF could show that we care about the people we serve, children, and get strong public support.

Let us for once stand up and fight for children as well as concerning ourselves with job security, salary increases, professional development, internal politics and pension funds. Children need advocates; let's be those advocates and get moving.

David Brear
North Vancouver

BCTF Newsletter
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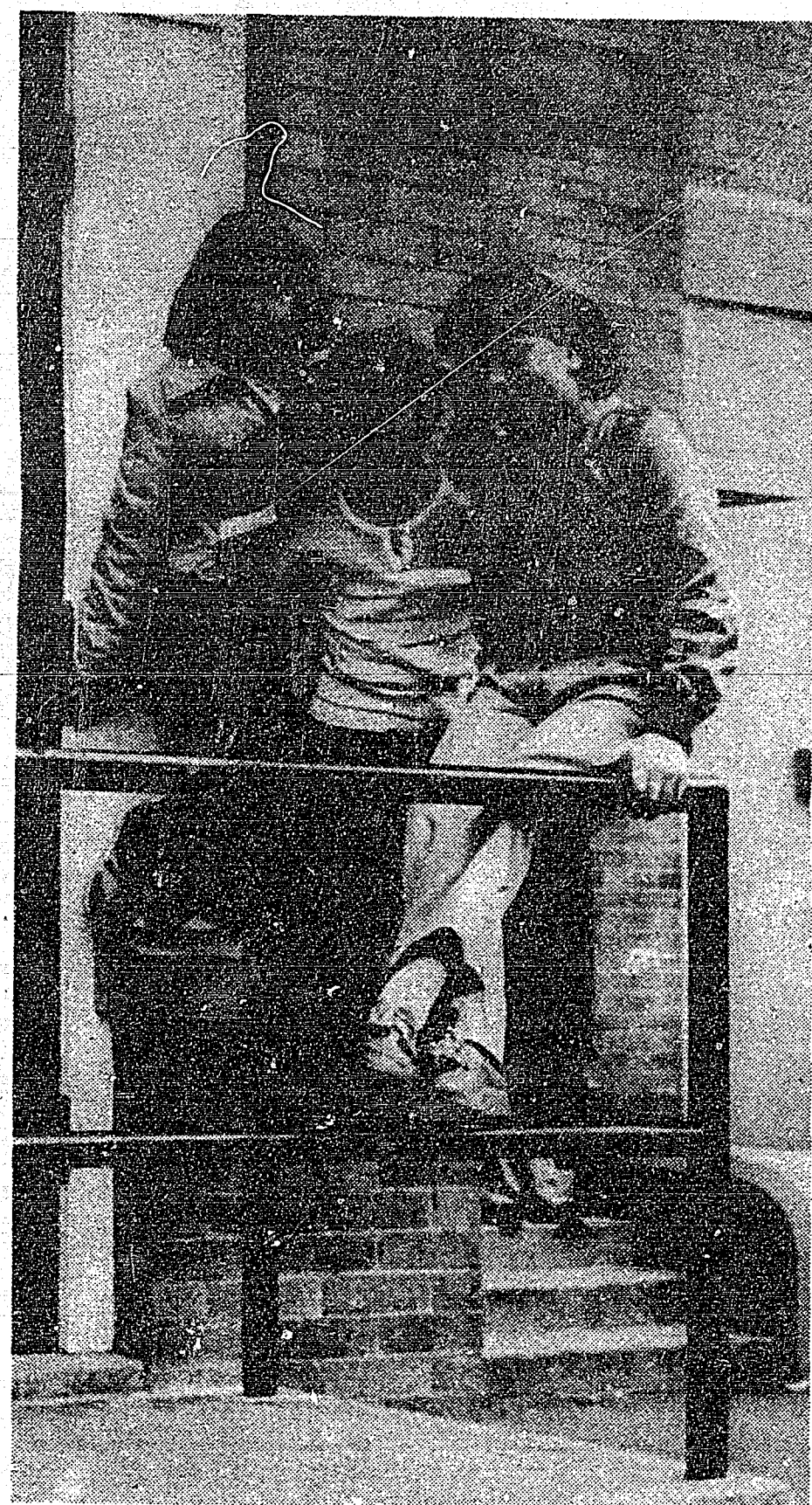
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SOME COMPARATIVE SALARIES											
	Teacher	Retail Clerk	IWA	B.C. Hydro	Cominco	Teamsters	Longshoremen	Pharmacist			
Yrs. of Training	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	5			
Starting Salary	15307	16503	22000	23000	20700	26200	21050	19344	21840	17160	
Final Salary	23268	26297	22000	23000	20700	26200	21050	19344	21840	26104	
Average Salary											
Over 20-Year Period	20881	23358	22000	23000	20700	26200	21050	19344	21840	25341	

Must spending decline when enrolment does?

Smaller school populations allow us to improve education without spending more. We should take advantage of that chance.

"It's a blessing in disguise. We shouldn't see it as a threat."



Whenever Dick Durante reads a story reporting that enrolment has declined again, he feels good.

He's not a school board official, anxious to establish a reputation among voters as a "fiscally responsible" budget-cutter. He's the principal of Sir Walter Moberly Elementary School in Vancouver, and to him the fact that school-age population is shrinking is great news.

"It's a blessing in disguise," he says. "I don't see it as a curse at all. We shouldn't see it as a threat."

At Moberly, in South Vancouver, problems and needs grew much faster in the last decade than the budget. Declining enrolment means that finally they can provide those basic services that lack of space, money and teachers prevented them from providing all these years.

If, that is, school trustees start looking at it from that perspective too.

"A lot of people in the profession are panicking over declining enrolment," Durante says. "A lot of the general public and politicians are thinking, now that enrolment is in decline, now is the time to save money."

"But declining enrolment is giving us the opportunity finally to do the things in education we've never been able to do before because of crowded conditions, expanding enrolment and a lack of funds. Now that we're in decline, we have the teachers, we have the space, we have the money to do those things."

More than 60 per cent of Moberly's 830 students are children for whom English is a second language. Immigration has dropped in the last few years, but you couldn't tell that by looking at Moberly's enrolment. Immigrants tend to settle close to their fellow immigrants, where they will feel more secure in an often-hostile new world. They usually speak their ancestors' language at home, so almost all immigrant children coming into the school speak no English, even when their older brothers and sisters at the school do. Last year, 47 of Moberly's 105 kindergarten pupils spoke no English — and 35 of them were born in Vancouver. This year, 57 of 96 kindergarteners don't know English.

The many ESL children (as Durante refers to them) plus the handful of physically handicapped students the mainstreaming policy has given them, put a great strain on the school. Durante is proud of the job his staff of 40 has done.

But those conditions are taking their toll in teachers' health. Enrolment may be declining, but the stress teachers work under keeps increasing. Durante says

five more teachers would allow the staff to keep its collective head above water. All but one of these five would have to have special qualifications.

The high proportion of ESL children is responsible for creating many of the special needs within the school, but Durante wants to dispel the notion that if they're taken care of, Moberly's problems will disappear.

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Enrolment in B.C. schools is expected to be down by 8,860 this September, according to projections.

This drop, to 492,166 students (full-time equivalents) from 501,926, represents a decline of 1.7 per cent. Most of that decline — 7,700 students — is at the secondary school level.

Fifty-one of 75 school districts are expecting a decline in student numbers. The largest numerical decline will occur in Vancouver, where about 2,500 fewer students are expected. The slightest decline is expected in Arrow Lakes, where the projections indicate a drop in enrolment of just 10.

In Coquitlam, a projected drop of 800 turned out to be a drop of fewer than 150 students, and the district has had to hire 20 teachers.

As in past years, there will be about 2,500 new teachers in the B.C. public school system. About 700 of these will be replacing teachers on leave of absence. About 200 will be replacing teachers who retired in June. Others will replace teachers who have returned to university or have gone to another job.

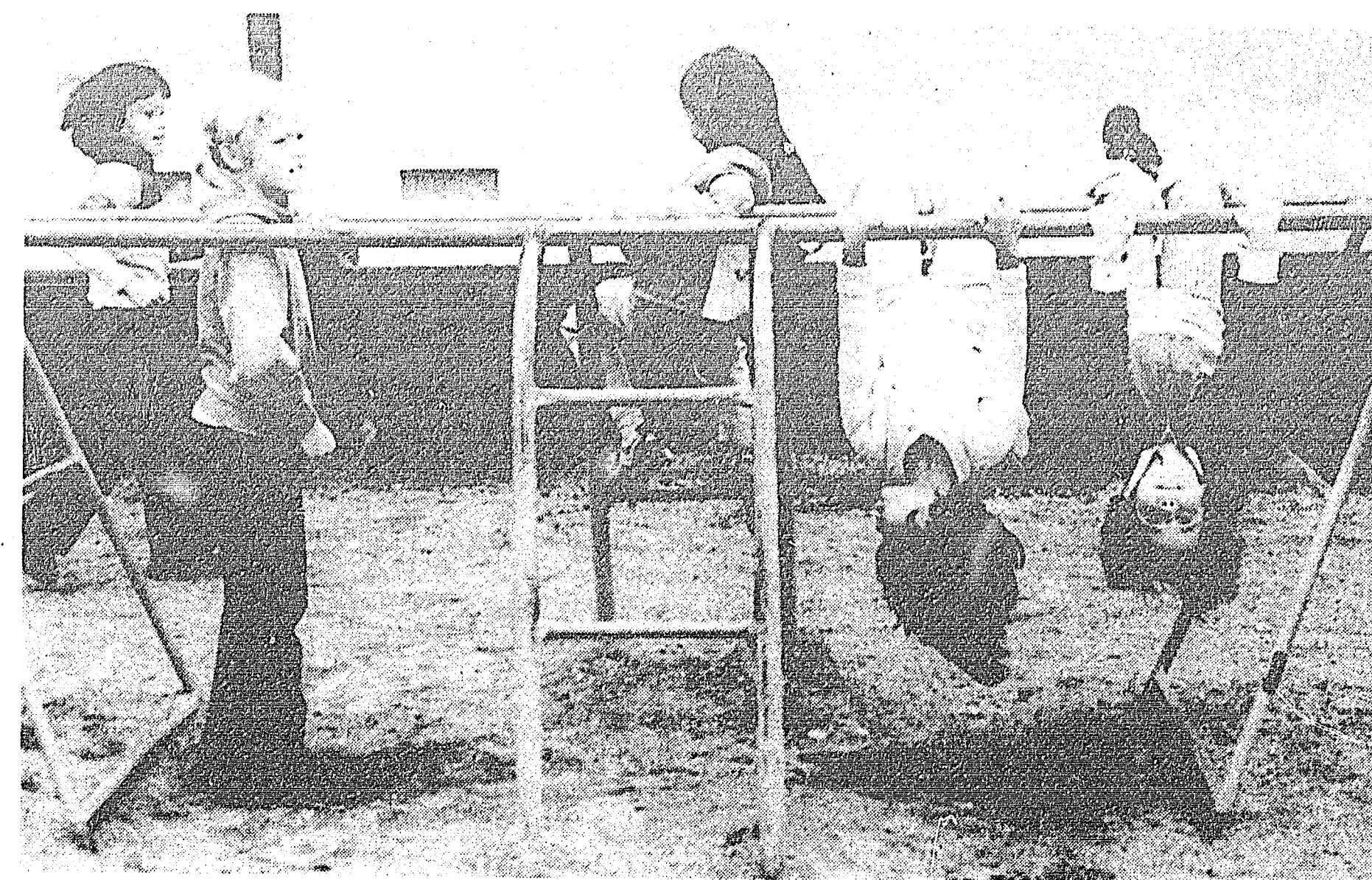
Many of the new teachers will be on temporary contract. The BCTF, through local associations, plans to keep close tabs on temporary contracts this year to ensure that the misuse that occurred last year is not repeated.

Because school boards will be hiring right up until early October it is too early to tell how many teachers will be without jobs. Some school boards have reported growing numbers of out-of-province teachers looking for work in B.C. This is to be expected, given the steeper enrolment decline in other parts of Canada.

—Wes Knapp

Learning Conditions Division

The BCTF plans to keep close tabs on temporary contracts this year to ensure that the misuse that occurred last year is not repeated.



Nathan Divinsky, chairperson of the Vancouver School Board, had a chilling back-to-school day message for returning Vancouver teachers: cutbacks linked to declining enrolment could cost you your job.

Divinsky's threat, made on CBC radio less than half an hour before classes started September 4, was quickly countered by Vancouver local association presidents. The same threat was made last year, they said, but no permanent teachers were fired.

Speaking on a program looking at declining enrolment in Vancouver schools, Divinsky said: "We've been able to not fire anyone on permanent contract by not rehiring people who retire or leave the system and temporaries, but now this year I think we're at the end of that. From now on, any cuts are going to be into the hard core of people with permanent jobs, and that's going to be very painful."

Thom Hansen, president of the Vancouver Secondary Teachers' Association, says there are enough unmet needs in the schools to absorb teachers freed from other duties by declining enrolment. Even if cutbacks are justified, he says, attrition alone should guarantee that all permanent teachers keep their jobs.

"The question of student needs will have to be addressed by the board this year," he says. "The public is more interested in the kind of education students are getting than in further reducing the budget."

Al Crawford, president of the Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association, says Divinsky's remark shows he is more concerned with cutting the budget than with quality education.

"He's continuing to ignore his responsibility, which is to provide quality education to all children in Vancouver," Crawford says. The threat of firings doesn't worry him either. Although 146 teaching positions were cut in Vancouver this year because of attrition, no permanent teachers were laid off. He expects the same thing will happen next year — departing teachers will create enough job openings.

"I hope the school trustees begin to look at declining enrolment in a different light," says Norma Mercer, president of the Vancouver School Administrators' Association. "I would rather the trustees looked at the creative possibilities as a result of freeing more money."

She says many trustees would support the teachers' position on declining enrolment if they knew more about what is happening in schools and what needs still exist.

"The public is more interested in the kind of education students are getting than in further reducing the budget."

"If they don't have that knowledge, they don't have a broad enough base on which to build their judgment. If they think only in terms of dollars and know little or nothing about the needs of students, they're not going to make the best decision regarding tax dollars."

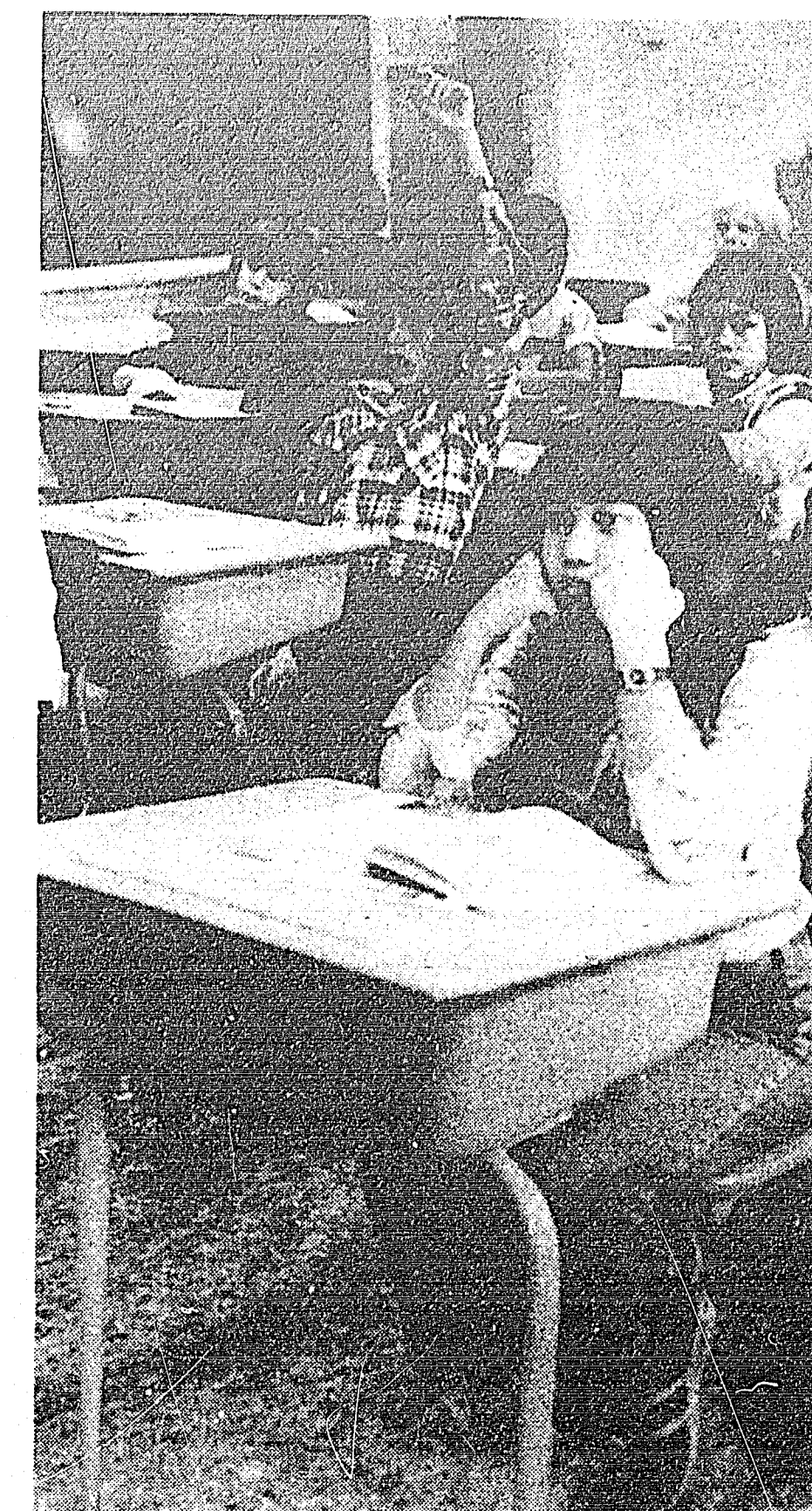
Teachers worried about their jobs can protect them best by becoming more active in the campaign to publicize unmet education needs, Mercer says. They should encourage their local associations to build a case for creating improvements and lowering the pupil-teacher ratio.

"I don't think we're dealing with a heartless board," Mercer says. "I do think they care. It's a matter of us working to make sure they have the information they need to make the decisions."

On the same radio show, Divinsky admitted the school board hires temporary teachers with the intention of firing them when cutbacks are made.

He defended the practice, saying that putting those

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"We need a better way of educating a large number of youngsters and equipping them to come to grips with world problems."

The BCTF's position on declining enrolment received support recently from a University of B.C. education professor and elementary schooling expert.

In a story in the *Province* newspaper, Dr. Roland Gray said that declining enrolment gives us a chance to improve education without increasing taxes.

That has long been the view of B.C. teachers. Unfortunately, many school boards instead look at declining enrolment simply as a chance to cut the budget by firing teachers.

High enrolment, which peaked a few years ago, put a strain on school services and turned them into sorting machines where there are winners and losers, Gray said. "We need a better way of educating a large number of youngsters and equipping them to come to grips with world problems."

Declining enrolment allows us to do that by freeing teachers and resources, Gray said. "If we let enrolments drop faster than resources, that would provide a greater opportunity for teachers to deal on a one-to-one basis with children who have trouble in their early learning."



'All that saved me was a wee railing'

From page 1

manor born, swivels his chair with great panache, presents a superbly critical back to the opposition and spreads the blarney as smoothly as an Irish bricklayer.

I'm just speculating whether I should corner the Speaker to see if he would be willing to reform the office of the Sergeant-at-Arms so that all those lance-corporals standing around could be serving pints to the spectators and show a profit for the province, and the hon. minister is just slipping into high rhetorical gear when he announces:

"We're satisfied that the core curriculum and the Provincial Learning Assessment Program have completely turned around the attitudes in our primary and secondary school system."

That's when I nearly dropped into the lap of the hon. member for Moose Pasture. Every body has trigger words, salivating words. Walk around a teachers' convention muttering "report cards" and you'll see what I mean — life-long friends bashing one another within minutes. My trigger words are Provincial Learning Assessment Program. Strong body tremors, hair sprouting on the cheeks, incisors growing three inches, this fat, amiable son of a Jekyll becomes a you-know-who, only saved from a crash-landing by a wee railing and a low centre of gravity.

Of course, when I recovered my

balance and the few wits I have, I realized that it was all hyperbole. If there is one thing that can be said, I said to myself, about schools it is their supreme ability to resist reform. And rightly so. A lifetime's acquaintance with myself has given me a healthy distrust of reformers.

The hon. minister would eventually learn, I told myself, that, regardless of the cut and thrust of debate about education, the schools go on doing what they have been doing, apparently sublimely indifferent to reforms and reformers.

I have had children in school longer than that coyote has been trying to catch that damned bird. Didn't they all bring home the same demands for Reeves water colors, the same old fill-in-the-blanks worksheets, the same dog-eared copy of Cowboy Sam and the Rustlers?

I still have kids in school. I must have a lot of kids — the house looks like a Breughel painting. Roll on September 4, and the teachers can have them back with a vote of thanks from this parent and his collegial cochair spouseperson. Considering the raw material they have had to work with the schools haven't done a bad job with my brood. But let no one try to con me that anything in school has changed very much in the last 20 years.

That's what I told myself as the hon. minister was perorating below. I shouldn't have listened to myself.

The first alarm bell should have rung just before six o'clock on Monday, July 9, and I quote from Hansard.

Ms. Sanford: I have one very brief question under this vote. Professional and special services has gone up from \$1.8 million to over \$3 million. This relates to public school education. Could the minister please give me a brief explanation of that?

Hon. Mr. McGeer: These, Mr. Chairman, are contracts that are established for people who are working out the curriculum or the assessment programs. Our policy is not to hire permanent people but to bring in by secondment the individuals we need to get the jobs done. Ms. Sandord: Why should it go up by that much for one year? Hon. Mr. McGeer: Because we're doing that much more work, Mr. Chairman.

Now any horseplayer knows that you don't take much notice of someone talking out a storm about some particular decrepit old hayburner but when the owner starts buying \$50 win tickets like they're going out of print, one's antenna should at least quiver.

Blame it on hunger and thirst, and not after righteousness, but I didn't listen to the signals. Wouldn't have mattered if I had. You can't get up and shout "Shame!" without incurring the wrath of just about everybody in sight in that legislature. That's another thing they could reform that would live things up for the spectators but I'm digressing as usual.

Wednesday, July 11, before going to check on up to what our hon. members were, as they say in Fowler, I spoke to a covey of teachers taking a summer school course at UVic. I talked to them for an hour, extolling the virtues and services offered by their beloved federation, and then they woke themselves up by telling me how things were in the chalky trenches.

I was astounded, flabbergasted — dig out your thesaurus, I was all the synonyms at once; the hon. minister had been absolutely accurate in his descriptions. Teacher after teacher, different schools, different districts, indicated that their classrooms were becoming dominated by those blasted tests. One or two of them even spoke darkly about the "authorities" speaking to them about how the marks on the test should be improved. I have not yet recovered. The Hon. Mr. McGeer appears to have triumphed where Plato, Comenius, Ivan Illich, A. S. Neill and Willie Shoemaker all failed. He has reformed the school system.

The faint hope lingers that some great joke has been played on me. Those teachers were assembled to delude me about the influence of the PLAP. They are not representative. The sample was not legitimate. The schools are still sailing serenely on unaffected by "Those behind cried forward and those before cried back."

Tell me that's what's so or I shall have to smash the stereo, cut out the cacophony and talk to my children. They may yet be saved from becoming like a row of Campbell's soup cans. Now which of this lot are mine?

RA to face Quebec issue

From page 3

educated in English when the charter came into force in 1977, or who have an English-educated parent who was a resident of Quebec at that time, are entitled to English-language schooling.

PACT has taken a defiant posture over the last three years. Its members have allowed any child who wants to be educated in English into their classes. Where the numbers are small, teachers have simply fitted the "Bill 101 kids" into their regular classes. Where the numbers are large, special classes have been set up with PACT paying the bill.

This sub-rosa system operates without the approval of the school boards or the government. Some boards have hired special truant officers ("language cops") to try to track down children attending English schools outside the law. Some have tried to take parents to court for

their children's "truancy" from the Francophone schools but, according to Dobie, these attempts have come to nothing.

He says it will cost PACT about \$200,000 this year to finance its 20 special classes. He said PACT is getting good support from parents' groups but needs more help from teachers throughout Canada.

LC course praised

From page 3

pairings, split off into zonal meetings in which local chairpersons and co-ordinators made preliminary plans for their fall programs, including regional conferences scheduled for September and October.

In addition to Nikola Filby, associate director of Far West Lab's Class Size and Instruction Project, other guests spoke

briefly at plenary sessions, including Menno Vorster, Toronto Teachers' Federation; Al Blakey, BCTF president; Marjatta Chapman, who was re-elected Learning Conditions Committee chairperson following the course, and Maureen McDonald of the BCTF Status of Women Committee.

Paddy Boyle, sophomore Learning Conditions Committee chairperson for West Vancouver, provided a closing session in which she described her experiences as a first-year chairperson, earning such written comments as "helpful," "inspiring," and "well done."

—George North
Learning Conditions Division

Pensions study

From page 1

said. "They're afraid they're going to be sick, or too old, and aren't going to be able to do things.

"But in actual fact, in some cases people enjoy better health than they did

before retirement because they don't have that stress to cope with anymore."

The report has been distributed to geographical representatives, local presidents and participants in the study. A limited number of copies of the study, or of a six-page summary, are available through the BCTF.

The Ministry of the Provincial Secretary and the Superannuation Board co-operated in the study and contributed \$25,000, almost half its cost.

Ethnic studies conference

Ethnicity, Power and Politics in Canada is the theme of a three-day conference in Vancouver October 11 to 13.

It is the Canadian Ethnic Studies Association's Biennial Conference, and registration is being conducted by the Centre for Continuing Education at the University of B.C., Vancouver V6T 1W5.

Registration fee is \$25. For more information, write to the centre or telephone 228-2181, local 220.

Vacancies

Creston-Kaslo

School District 86

Principal

A principal is required for Prince Charles Secondary School in Creston. Basic qualifications are a professional certificate and experience as an administrator.

Applications should be addressed to L. Beduz, District Superintendent of Schools, P.O. Box 1640, Creston V0B 1G0.

Closing date for applications is September 21, but late applications will be accepted from persons unaware of the competition until the appearance of this advertisement.

North Thompson

School District 26

Principal

Clearwater Secondary School requires a principal effective January 1, 1980. This is a very modern, attractive and well-equipped school enrolling approximately 490 pupils, grades 8 to 12. A full range of programs is offered.

Candidates for this position should possess secondary administrative experience, academic training and personality traits suitable to work with a vigorous and enthusiastic staff.

Please send applications and supporting data to arrive by September 22, 1979 to District Superintendent of Schools, Box 1314, Clearwater V0E 1N0.

Sick pay increases now in effect

Salary Indemnity Fund payments go up slightly as of this month as result of a new benefits schedule approved by the Executive Committee.

The new schedule increases the average monthly benefit by 5.4 per cent. In addition, the schedule has been lengthened. Under the old schedule, the top benefit was \$1,227, payable to members earning \$30,000 a year and more. Under the new schedule, the ceiling is \$1,600 a month for members earning \$40,000 or more.

Members now receive \$15.50 per month in benefits for every \$1 they pay into the fund. Under the old schedule, the ratio was \$15/\$1.

The Executive Committee also approved a new Salary Indemnity Fund regulation to govern pay to members for rehabilitative work, but sick pay will be reduced by a rate of 50 per cent of the pay for the rehab work.

The benefits of a member receiving pay for another job while on sick leave, other than for approved rehabilitative purposes, will be reduced by the amount of their pay from that job.

Three appointed to ministry

The Ministry of Education made three major appointments in its schools department.

Carl Daneliuk, 45, former superintendent of schools for the Prince George school district, is now senior superintendent of public instruction and will be responsible for curriculum.

He succeeds John Meredith, who retired in August after 32 years in the ministry.

A.J.H. Newberry, 41, of Dawson Creek has been appointed program superintendent, field personnel services. Wayne Desharnais, 35, of Prince George is the new program superintendent, special programs.

No nukes, please

The Gulf Islands Teachers' Association has called for an immediate moratorium on any uranium exploration.

The resolution, passed at GITA's annual general meeting in June, cites the danger exploration presents to the health of those in the area, the fact that much of the uranium is used for nuclear weapons, and the fact that there exists no safe disposal method for the highly-toxic waste from nuclear reactors.

"The association feels that it is particularly appropriate in this, the International Year of the Child, to take a clear and forceful stand on this issue in view of the vast implications for all living and future generations of the children of the world," says a GITA spokesperson.

Our apologies

A story on teacher-candidates in the May federal election, which appeared in the June 8 issue of the *BCTF Newsletter*, did not mention five teachers and former teachers who ran for Parliament.

Three successful Progressive Conservative candidates are from the teaching ranks.

Victoria MP Allan McKinnon, the minister of defence, is a former teacher. Fraser Valley West MP Robert Wenman formerly taught in Burnsville Junior Secondary in Delta. Don Taylor, MP for Cowichan-Malahat-The Islands, resigned from his teaching position at

News briefs

exchange or secondment program, it could be implemented for the 1980-81 school year.

The committee was formed late last year in response to a decline in teacher mobility between districts, and included BCTF staffer Ann Dahl.

Exchange teachers welcomed

The BCTF welcomes the following teachers from Ontario, the U.S., the United Kingdom and West Germany, who are teaching in B.C. this year on exchange programs:

John William Snoddy of Norwich, Ont.; Richard Wyatt of St. Catharines, Ont.; Brian Jeffrey Bemel of Oak View, Calif.; Robert Christian MacMillan of Yorktown Heights, N.Y.; Walter Baird Godfrey of Littleton, Colorado; Jacqueline Ford of London, England.

Christine Margaret Weaving of Middlesex, England; Margaret Dix of Glynneath, Wales; Philip Andrew Barlow of Lincolnshire, England; Ann Gwenllian Williams of Cardiff, Wales; Dorothy Ann Brennan of Durham, England;

Susan Valerie Green of Warwickshire, England; Elma Ann MacIver of Inverness-Shire, Scotland; Christal Margaret Wester of Herts, England; Christine Elise Mitchell of Yorkshire, England; Irene Elizabeth Daley of London, England;

Stephen Mitchell of Yorkshire, England; Margaret Welton of Suffolk, England; Geoffrey Oliver of Berkshire, England and Everhard Holdinghausen, Helmut Jansch, Erika Ries and Siegfried Schmidt of West Germany.

Omission

A procedure statement dealing with educational leave was left out of the 1979-80 Members' Guide by mistake.

The statement, 12.04, should read: "That the BCTF encourage local associations to negotiate paid educational leave for teachers to obtain their first degrees."

It was passed at the annual general meeting in March.

Lions need help

The B.C. Lions Society for Crippled Children, which transports thousands of handicapped children to and from school every day, needs to raise \$2 million from the public this year and is asking teachers for help.

The society says it will cost \$5 million to operate its services — last year, its Easter Seal buses gave rides to 6,500 people a day — and 40 per cent of that must come from public donations.

The society is at 171 West 6th Avenue, Vancouver V5Y 1K5. For more information, contact Carol Tudan at 873-1865.

Project Overseas

Application forms for Project Overseas 1980 are now available from Ann Dahl of BCTF's Employment Information Service, 2235 Burrard Street, Vancouver V6J 3H9.

As result of a rule change, applicants are no longer required to hold university degrees. A teacher's certificate is required.

This year 15 B.C. teachers are teaching overseas as part of the program.

PSA picks exec

The B.C. Hospital-Homebound Teachers' Association, one of the BCTF's two newest provincial specialist organizations, has picked an executive for this year.

President is Gary Lindquist of Courtenay. Other executive members are Dutchie Mathison (Maple Ridge), John Bell (Powell River), Sharon Steele (Burns Lake), Diane Hogan (North Vancouver), Ted Sullivan (Campbell River) and Audrey Moorman (Cowichan).

New members are welcome, and teachers can get more information from any of these people or through the BCTF office.

Primary conference

The B.C. Primary Fall Conference, with the International Year of the Child as its theme, is on October 12 and 13 at the Richmond Inn hotel.

Sessions will deal with mainstreaming, nutrition and behavior, devices for early diagnosis, the new language arts curriculum, cultural needs in early education, mastery learning, commodities in education, and programs for the gifted.

For more information, contact conference organizers at Box 94036, Richmond V6Y 2A2. Registration is limited.

Children's rights

At the request of the Canadian Teachers' Federation, the BCTF invites B.C. teachers to submit sample lessons on the rights of the child.

The BCTF will select five sample lessons to be forwarded to the national federation. The CTF Committee on Quality and Innovations in Education will choose, from the samples submitted by provincial bodies, those it considers most worthy of publication. These will be compiled by grade level and distributed to the member organizations.

Deadline for submission of lessons to the BCTF is December 1.

Immersion

The Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers is holding its third annual convention Nov. 1 to 3 in Toronto.

For further information write CAIT at Post Office Alta Vista, P.O. Box 8843, Ottawa, Ontario K1G 3H8.

FREE

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE CHILD KIT

Teacher's Guide • Student Materials • T.V. Program

An opportunity for you and your students to receive professionally developed and tested classroom materials on international themes.

All materials distributed FREE to your school in early September.

UNICEF/RED CROSS INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE CHILD SCHOOLS PROJECT

LOOK FOR IT



IE teachers to meet

Industrial education expert J. L. Feirer of Western Michigan University will be the featured speaker at the 1979 B.C. Industrial Education Association's Convention, October 12 and 13 in Vancouver's Plaza 500 hotel. For more information, contact BCIEA president Bob Logan at 943-7407.

Moberly

From page 4

He does feel strongly, though, that other needs can only be met if schools start playing the role in the community he envisions for them. "I've always had the feeling that schools should form the nucleus of the community," Durante says. This would be done by giving people a reason to come to the school for something besides classroom instruction, and by having the school staff go into the homes of the community.

"We have large numbers of kids from single-parent families, from families on assistance or UIC, from large families living in crowded conditions. They are disadvantaged in terms of culture and learning materials in the home.

"The school should be providing services to these

UBCM wants better financing plan

Delegates to the Union of B.C. Municipalities convention called for increased provincial funding for public schools.

The convention, held in Vancouver September 5 to 7, also directed the UBCM executive to meet with the B.C. School Trustees' Association and try to make a joint presentation to the government.

The BCTF welcomes the continued support from the UBCM in terms of ensuring both an adequate level of funding for public schools and a reasonable level of local/provincial sharing. In Proposition Fairtax, the BCTF advocated a reduction in the reliance on local taxation to finance education. School districts must receive grants that provide for real growth in their purchasing power. Education costs after all are not immune to the effects of inflation. Tax relief to homeowners — with possibly an extension of that relief to small business — must be indexed so that the grant is not minimized by inflation.

For more than 50 years the UBCM has been urging the provincial government to reduce or eliminate the cost to the local taxpayer for education. Rather than

proposing full funding, the executive's report recommended an option based on the McMath report on property assessment and taxation.

The UBCM has interpreted the 75/25 sharing called for in the McMath report and recommended that only the Basic Education Program be shared on that basis. Other segments of the budget would be shared differently. The result: A cost sharing of 69/31. The sharing is now 39/61 if you do not include the homeowner grant, and 58/42 if you do.

This new level of funding would have required an additional \$119.4 million from provincial revenue in 1979. The UBCM calculation incorporates the homeowner grant into the direct grants paid by the province in order to reduce the level of local responsibility to 31 per cent.

The report noted possible sources of revenue: a 48½ point income tax rate (up 4½ points); a 5 per cent sales tax (up 1 per cent), or an increase in provincial revenue of 4.8 per cent.

Delegates raised a number of concerns. It was felt the fine tuning of the sharing arrangements was better dealt with by the

BCSTA. It was suggested that the impact of the options presented was not completely clear. Loss of revenue available at the local level, for example, might be compensated for by a less equitable tax. These and other reservations prompted the desire to consult with the BCSTA.

The BCSTA has called for a 75/25 sharing of the entire current school costs. No distinctions are drawn between various costs. The trustees feel that the BEP — which is really not a program but simply part of an arithmetic cost-sharing formula — should be set at 90 per cent of the current operating budget. If this were the case, the unshared operating costs would be reduced, thereby requiring less local revenue.

The BCSTA — as well as the BCTF and others — view the homeowner grants as transfer payments to individuals. The

government could continue to provide, or even extend, tax relief. But if the basic responsibility of the local tax base were reduced to 25 per cent (the BCTF has called for an 80/20 sharing) the costs to homeowners would largely be eliminated.

Because homeowner grants dramatically reduce the amount of education costs paid for by homeowners, the main beneficiaries of a new cost-sharing formula would be business and industry. This sector, however, is the one which now exerts the most pressure on school boards to reduce spending.

Equality of tax effort is a concern. The UBCM report implies that a system of provincial equalization grants would continue. Without such a provision, taxpayers in a district with a lower assessment level would be required to make a greater effort in terms of tax rate and even taxes paid than taxpayers in a "wealthier" district.

While it is possible to differ with some of the assertions made in the report and to question some of the calculations, teachers and trustees can accept the concept that the provincial government should assume a greater share of the education costs.

—Dennis Rankin
Learning Conditions Division

UBCM PROPOSAL

	Prov. Share (Percentage)	Local Share
Basic Education Program	75	25
Local Enrichment	—	100
Non-operating	10	90
Debt servicing	60	40
Non-shareable capital	—	100
TOTAL	69	31

BCTF organizes IYC conference in Richmond

In addition to the BCTF's ongoing commitment to the interests of children, it is planning another contribution to mark this, the International Year of the Child.

That contribution is its Invest in Youth and Children Conference, to be held in the Richmond Inn November 23 and 24.

Among the 175 delegates expected to the conference are representatives from 20 social agencies working with children. Together, they will work to develop a unified team approach to provision of services to children.

Secondary aims of the conference are to spawn a generation of similar though smaller conferences within smaller communities, and to press the provincial government to increase its support of and commitment to services for children.

Organizers Dulce Oikawa and John Church of the BCTF intend the IYC conference to promote recognition of the vital link between programs for children on one hand, and economic social progress on the other — an aim contained in the statement of purposes composed by the United Nations in declaring this year International Year of the Child.

Keynote speakers will be Norm Goble, general secretary of the Canadian Teachers' Federation, and Philip Hepworth, professor of social work at the University of Regina. Neville Scarfe, former education dean at the University of B.C., will speak at a dinner winding up the conference.

The BCTF, as organizing group, is the

only body allowed to send more than 10 delegates to the IYC Conference. Teachers will be represented by 10 persons from the Provincial Specialist Associations, 10 from the B.C. Primary Teachers' Association and 10 from the BCTF at large. In addition, the BCTF is sending 20 students from the metropolitan Vancouver area to the conference.

The conference will cost \$13,350. Delegates from participating organizations will pay a nominal \$10 delegate's fee. The BCTF Executive Committee, at its August meeting in Vernon, amended the BCTF budget to add \$9,930 to the \$2,350 already set aside for the conference.

The amendment allows the BCTF to pay the complete cost, including travel and accommodation, of sending 30 delegates to the conference.

Participating organizations include the Registered Nurses Association of B.C., the B.C. Association of Childhood Education, the B.C. Federation of Labor, the B.C. Association of Social Workers, Red Cross, the B.C. Preschool Teachers' Association, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, and Haida Counselling and Legal Assistance.

Meanwhile, the Joint UNICEF/Red Cross IYC learning materials kit is now available through your school office. It contains three programs aimed at children between the ages of 5 and 7, 8 and 12, and 13 and 18 — a teacher's edition, a poster, and a Day of the Child program, outlining activities for October 24, International Day of the Child, plus an evaluation form for every teacher.

The CBC will broadcast an International Day of the Child program on October 22. Check your local listings for the time.

Project TEACH is back

Last year 29 Project TEACH classes were conducted, serving teachers in 23 communities. Four hundred and ninety-four teachers participated in the course. They consistently rated both the program and the instructors as excellent, and said Project TEACH was among the best professional development programs they had ever taken.

Because of this positive response, the BCTF has been able to expand the program. Eighteen outstanding B.C. teachers participated in a comprehensive

training session at UBC and earned certification as Project TEACH instructors. They will return to their own communities to offer the course to teachers this fall.

Project TEACH offers, among many aspects, an opportunity for teachers to meet and learn together, practice new skills, share successes and concerns, and participate in healthy self-examination. The skill and dedication of the instructor, and their willingness to share with others, are the foundation of the program.

Consult the poster in your staffroom for details of fall classes.



BCTF Past President Pat Brady presents BCTF Trophy for Best Film in Elementary Class to Dean Manley, representing Twelfth Avenue Elementary School in Burnaby. Manley and classmates won prize at 11th Annual B.C. Student Film Festival in June.

Pilot program for the gifted under way

Bright children in 63 B.C. classrooms are receiving special attention this year as the provincial government's pilot program for "gifted" children gets under way.

A small group of Grades 4 and 5 students will be given extra-difficult work in language arts, science, math and social studies. Selected grade 12 students will get extra work in the humanities.

"It is essential that the school system challenge all pupils to the limit of their ability," Education Minister Pat McGeer said when he discussed the program in August. "The core curriculum does it for most, and we have special programs for those who learn below the level of the core. Now we are taking the first step in a plan to provide a higher level of intellectual activity for pupils who have the capacity and desire to excel."

Stan Blank, a professor of education psychology at the University of B.C., was put in charge of creating a curriculum for the program, described by McGeer as a pilot for an eventual, full-scale program for children with above-average academic

skills. That is still two or three years away, he says.

In August, 60 teachers took a brief course at Vancouver's Jericho Hill School to learn from Blank how to teach these children. They came from 43 of B.C.'s 75 school districts.

"The reason we're starting with Grade 4 is that it's the first grade you can have pretty good confidence that the kids read well enough to do self-directed learning," Blank says. "That's what a lot of it is — studying on their own. So they must have some of the basic skills."

The children taking part in the program were selected by schools on the basis of results from standard tests and on the recommendation of teachers.

John Church of the BCTF's Professional Development Division is happy that the education provided to those children is being tailored to their skills, but says he hopes the government realizes that other children's skills should also be recognized.

He's also worried about the tendency to call "gifted" only those children who are better at reading, writing and arithmetic.

"They've taken a narrow range of skills and blown them up and said 'These are important skills, and those aren't,'" he says. "In effect, when you have a program for the 'gifted,' it implies that the other programs you have are for the ungifted."