

Tide turns against cutbacks

The tide of public opinion appears to be finally turning against further cutbacks in public education.

Signs of this trend were made evident recently when:

- nine Greater Vancouver school boards publicly demanded the return of local taxing power and that there be no budget cuts for the remainder of this school year;

- voters showed a clear preference for anti-cutback, pro-education candidates in school board elections;

- 800 Coquitlam parents walked out on their Social Credit MLA in a public meeting, angrily protesting threatened further school budget cuts.

"We're finally seeing the fruits of our efforts over the past few years," said BCTF President Pat Clarke. "Trustees and parents are now coming to realize that further cuts will really do harm to the education system. It's good to see that protest actions are now being taken by someone other than teachers."

The Coquitlam protests have given the

most dramatic indication of the changing public attitudes. The district, due to government cutbacks and the change in the budget year, faces a \$2.6 million shortage which has raised the prospect that between 60 to 100 temporary teachers may be terminated in the new year. The school board and parents have joined with teachers in fighting further cuts.

"We're getting tremendous support from the community," said Gordon Wickerson, president of the Coquitlam Teachers' Association.

The board has protested to the ministry and joined with teachers in holding school-based public protest meetings. The public mood was made clear at a crowded school board meeting in late November when 800 parents jeered and walked out on John Parks, Social Credit MLA (Maillardville-Coquitlam), as he defended the cuts and suggested the district was guilty of "poor planning."

"The parents were not buying that," said Gordon Wickerson. "They stood up

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BCTF Newsletter

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New policy proposed on bargaining rights, professional role

Over the next four months B.C. teachers will be asked to decide exactly what kinds of bargaining and professional rights they want to have.

The BCTF Task Force on Bargaining and Professional Rights has produced a detailed set of recommendations that is intended to end a long period of uncertainty and ambiguity and to set out a clear, coherent position on teacher rights and responsibilities that the BCTF desires laid down in legislation.

At its November 24 meeting, the BCTF Executive Committee adopted the task force's 77-page report in principle and agreed on a process for wide membership debate, with referral of the recommendations to the January Representative Assembly for possible amendment and to the 1985 Annual General Meeting for decision.

The executive also decided to consider a method of membership ratification of the AGM decision at its January meeting.

In the report's key highlights, the task force recommends that the BCTF:

- seek full collective bargaining rights under a legislative framework combining School Act procedures specifically suited

See "Member" page 2



Using knowledge to counter racism. Surrey teacher Sid Bentley has developed a world religion social studies unit that is now being taught in 100 B.C. schools. See story page 3.

BCTF under-represented

Ministry school review panned

The BCTF recently received new grounds for doubting that the provincial government school review process will undertake as extensive reexamination of public education as is needed.

The indications came from the government's:

- decision to give private schools equal representation with the BCTF on the Provincial School Review Committee;
- production of a discussion paper that ignores school funding and levels of service, and glosses over vital curriculum issues.

At its November 23 meeting, the BCTF Executive Committee responded by deciding not to send any representatives to the government's school review committee, but to continue participating in the reexamination of education and to continue steps to organize an independent commission on public education.

BCTF President Pat Clarke told the executive that the education ministry had selected only one (Berenice Wod of Burnaby) of three federation-nominated

representatives and chose another BCTF representative (Norm Ornes of Vancouver) on its own for the Provincial School Review Committee. The selections were not the problem, he said, but the fact that the government also named an independent school teacher and a pre-school teacher. (The BCTF's other nominees were Frances Worledge of Vancouver and George Young of Armstrong.)

Clarke, "that the organization that represents 90 per cent of the teachers in this province should have only 50 per cent of the representation on this committee."

He went on to say that the ministry's discussion paper, *Let's Talk About Schools*, also raised doubts whether the government intended to do anything more than tinker with the public education system. "There is nothing in the paper about the funding of schools or the level of service," Clarke said, adding that "the discussion of curriculum is so irrelevant to the really key issues that it's hard to believe that the people setting the direc-

tion for the system are not embarrassed putting it out."

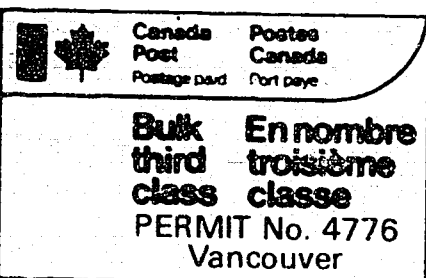
During discussion, the executive made clear its skepticism about government intentions, but maintained a determination to do everything possible to press for a wider and more comprehensive review of public education than the government apparently has in mind.

Specifically, the motion adopted on the review committee urged:

"That the BCTF not participate in the Provincial School Review Committee under the conditions set by the government but that it participate in the general process of school review to ensure that the essential questions about funding and resources as well as the nature of the system are injected into the review."

The executive then went on to adopt a motion that any federation representation on the government's review committee would have to be "in accordance with normally accepted procedures by the BCTF for representation on ministry

See "Stakeholders" page 2



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"Stakeholders" meeting to decide on public education commission

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committees." The meeting also agreed that the executive would attend the December 3 Vancouver meeting of the Provincial School Review Committee with a view to having the balance of representation changed.

In a related matter, the executive discussed a report from the BCTF Task Force on the Public Commission on Education which recommended that the decision whether to go ahead with an independent public education commission be taken at a meeting of representatives of interested groups invited to a "stakeholders" meeting on November 28 and that the executive approve a series of general proposals about the commission for discussion at that meeting.

The task force's general proposals covered the goals of the commission, selection of commissioners, the terms of reference, the commission secretariat and the timelines (October 1, 1985 suggested for release of the report). Invited to the November 28 "stakeholders" meeting were the presidents of: BCTF, B.C. School Trustees Association, B.C. Home and School Federation, B.C. Association of Colleges, Canadian Union of Public Employees, College-Institute Educators' Association, Association of B.C. School Superintendents, Canadian Federation of Students, University of B.C., Simon Fraser University, University of Victoria, UBC Faculty Association, SFU Faculty Association, UVic Faculty Association and the B.C. Federation of Labour.

No decision was made at that meeting, the matter being left for a second "stakeholders" meeting in January.

Member ratification of AGM decision to be considered

From page 1
to teacher bargaining with all other matters covered by the Labour Code;

- obtain an effective dispute resolution mechanism that would give teachers the right to choose arbitration or legal strike action to resolve bargaining disputes;

- achieve a much greater level of teacher responsibility for and involvement in decisions on teacher certification, curriculum change, student evaluation, school timetables and student placement, and evaluation of colleagues whose competence is questioned;

- and seek majority representation on a committee considering teachers' pension legislation changes and equal representation with government representatives on the committee guiding pension fund investments.

There was unanimity among the executive in praising the comprehensiveness of the task force's report, but there was considerable debate as to whether the recommendations should be proceeded with now and on arrangements for involving the full membership in the decision.

Concern was expressed with the task force's proposal for "a unique method for final ratification" which would involve members ratifying the AGM decision by secret ballot vote in local association general meetings.

Executive members agreed on the necessity of giving members full opportunity for involvement in the final decision, but were uncertain as to whether the suggested method was the right one. The executive decided to consider the matter at its January meeting.

Members of the BCTF Task Force on Bargaining and Professional Rights included chairperson Mike Gregory (Vancouver), Shirley Bonfield (Port Alberni), Don Crowe (Kelowna), Pauline Galinski (Powell River), Ghamin Harris (Kamloops), Jim MacFarlan (Burnaby), David Mitchell (Port Hardy), Norm Prince (Port Hardy) and Ray Worley (Vernon).

2/NOVEMBER 30, 1984

Editorial

School review doubts

The recent Grad '87 paper revealed that the public does not approve of attrition of the public school system and piecemeal change based on no discernible plan. Out of that furor came a widespread demand for a commission of inquiry into education — a demand rejected by the minister in favour of a "school review."

On December 2-3, the minister has called a meeting in Vancouver of three representatives from each school district (the superintendent and one representative each from the board and local teachers) to begin this review process. They will discuss a ministry paper, *Let's Talk About Schools*, which outlines the issues and a process for public reaction. The whole review is to be completed by the end of January 1985 and is to result in a re-written School Act.

No one denies the need for a new School Act — four education ministers have promised one — but before any new legislation is drafted we need a full-scale study of our educational needs, now and into the future. That is essential. The government's proposed review process is unlikely to satisfy that need.

Consider the recent history of this issue:

May 1984: The ministry asked some superintendents and secretary-treasurers to make suggestions on "de-regulation" of the School Act, but this didn't work out. Instead a group was proposed, made up of superintendents, secretary-treasurers, trustees and teachers, to develop a white paper.

July 1: The group met — but teachers were not invited — and developed, not a white paper, but an issues and questions document for public response.

August 15: The BCTF heard of the School Act Committee for the first time when trustees and superintendents revealed their draft paper; two days later the federation's president and first vice-president met with the education minister and sought teacher representation on the proposed School Act review.

Mid-September: The BCTF was presented with a new plan for the review featuring a steering committee of teachers, trustees, superintendents and secretary-treasurers, with the members to be chosen by the minister from ministry lists in consultation with the groups involved. This School Review Committee would have responsibility for the response document, a poll, organization of public reaction and the final report.

September 22: The BCTF Executive Committee agreed to participate in the review committee provided that the federation could nominate its own representatives. Three names were put forward.

November 21: Three months after becoming aware of the review, the BCTF was informed that four teachers had been chosen for the committee, one from the BCTF list, one who was not nominated (but who would not participate without BCTF approval) one independent school teacher and one pre-school teacher. Three days later the executive declined federation participation under these conditions.

Our position remains as it was in August. No review of schools is likely to succeed unless it has the involvement of teachers. The BCTF is the professional voice for more than 90 per cent of B.C. teachers and should name its representatives to the review committee.

But the problems go deeper than representation. The School Review Committee is an administrative group that excludes the wider public. Its intended approach is not wide open; it will set pre-conceived issues and questions before the public. The committee will produce a report, without recommendations, that will become the basis for School Act revision. The scope of the review is wide but its deadline is unrealistically tight: response from the public is to be completed by the end of January 1985.

We believe that if this review is to have any success there must at least be broader membership on the planning group, expanded terms of reference, and more time for public contributions to the process.

Without such changes, the ministry's review process will give the appearance, but not the reality, of a much-needed examination of public education. That is what the BCTF has consistently advocated and we remain willing to cooperate with any serious, open examination of public education in British Columbia.

Tom Hutchison
Acting director
Government division

Task force proposes new bargaining rights, professional role

The report of the BCTF Task Force on Bargaining and Professional Rights sets out an ideal for the federation to work towards.

Task force member Ray Worley put the report in this perspective in discussing its sweeping recommendations in the November 24 Executive Committee meeting. "This report contains the best of all possible worlds that any government could give us," he admitted. "This is the ideal."

The following, in summary form, are the highlights of the report.

The task force recommends that the BCTF adopt a **statement of teachers' employee rights** that would ensure:

- the right to have fair employee bargaining procedures for teachers set in legislation;

- extending the right to bargain collectively, protection against unfair employment practices, independent third-party arbitration in disputes and "the right to an effective dispute resolution mechanism for bargaining disputes which includes the right of teachers to elect to resolve an impasse by either arbitration or by legal withdrawal of services."

- the general right to negotiate the terms and conditions of teachers' employment;

- giving the right to negotiate fair compensation, reasonable employment security, appropriate workloads, fair personnel practices and other matters affecting working conditions;

- the right to fair and responsible pension protection;

- giving teachers majority representation on a committee proposing pension legislation changes and equal representation with government appointees on the committee overseeing pension fund investments.

The task force advocates teachers having greater involvement in educational decision-making and specifically urges the BCTF to adopt a **statement of teachers' professional responsibilities** setting out such expanded responsibilities as:

- providing considered views on teacher training through representation on the Joint Board of Teacher Education;

- establishing standards for and maintaining teachers' professional certification;

- determining the processes and instruments of student evaluation;

- directing the placement and programming of students, and school teaching programs and timetables;

- appointing a panel of educators to evaluate teachers threatened with termination for unsatisfactory teaching performance.

To achieve these rights and responsibilities, the task force urged the BCTF to press for a **new statutory framework** under which the federation would seek to:

- achieve full collective bargaining rights on the basis of procedures in the School Act specifically suited to teacher bargaining with all other matters coming under coverage of the Labour Code;

- have specified in the School Act continued local bargaining and the right to choose arbitration or strike action to resolve disputes;

- maintain fair pension and protection through the Teacher Pension Act;

- obtain statutory recognition of professional responsibilities in such matters as certification, curriculum, evaluation of students and teachers through revisions to the School Act.

The report then goes on to recommend a series of specific legislative proposals, changes to BCTF policies and procedures, a process for wide discussion within the federation leading up to the AGM decision and, following that, a strategy for winning government and public approval. The complete report is available through local association offices.

Twelve years ago Sid Bentley got fed up seeing Sikh children being taunted and mistreated by other children on the grounds of his Surrey school.

So Bentley, a former merchant seaman who became a teacher in his late 30s, set out to combat racial prejudice by the best method he knew: education. With the encouragement of his principal and Surrey School Board, he developed an optional world religions unit for junior social studies and began teaching it in his school, William Beagle Junior Secondary, then three years ago sold the Ministry of Education on publishing his material — and now the program is being taught in more than 100 schools around B.C.

"I guess I'm something of a crusader," said Bentley, who is now frequently on the move giving workshops and talks to teachers, students and parents. "I became committed to this because of the prejudice I've seen. I've seen Sikhs treated like second-class citizens, and I thought, maybe it's all a simple lack of understanding. Ignorance breeds prejudice."

Entitled "Religion of Our Neighbors", Sid Bentley's program is designed to be taught in the history section of Social Studies 8. It surveys the main elements of Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism, as well as touching on some minority religions. The ministry has published the material in eight booklets, which take about 40 classroom hours to cover.

When Bentley teaches the unit, he takes on the role of his subject to more realistically convey the religion's beliefs and customs. "When I teach Judaism, I wear the kepa [skull cap] in the classroom," he

explains. "When I teach Buddhism, I teach that there is no God, that man is alone and must solve his own problems. When I teach Christianity, I become a Christian."

He strongly believes that knowledge of different religious beliefs, customs and practices disarms prejudice. "If we learn the significance of the turban, or that a *kara* is a steel bangle bracelet worn on the right wrist of a Sikh as a reminder to do nothing that would displease God, or that the *kanga* is a wooden comb and symbol of cleanliness, we are taking the first steps

in getting to know and appreciate our neighbor."

Towards the end of discussion of each religion, Bentley invites a representative of that faith to visit the classroom to give students an opportunity to get an "insider's view" of the faith. Classroom guests have included a Brahmin priest, a Tibetan lama, a Sikh gianni or learned man, a Protestant minister, a rabbi and a Muslim imman, the leader of prayer. Using discussions with such religious representatives, he has also produced a series of videotapes on the material.



Surrey teacher Sid Bentley believes little things — like a student having a Sikh priest tie a turban on his head — often do much to create more positive student attitudes.

Pro-education trustees gain in board elections

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time after time and said no matter how you cut it, there simply is not enough money being provided for education in this district."

In the latest development, the Coquitlam board has extended the contracts of temporary teachers until the end of January to give more time to avoid the cuts. The board also decided to join with other boards in pressing the government to inject more funding into education.

As another dramatic sign of the times, the metropolitan Vancouver branch of the B.C. School Trustees Association held a news conference to protest the "emasculatation" of school boards by the government's cutbacks program.

"We are feeling very frustrated by our reduced autonomy and authority to act," said Jonathan Taylor, metro branch president and also chairperson of the Coquitlam board. "We resent this emasculatation and the subsequent perceived lack of accountability to our local electors and taxpayers."

Taylor told reporters that the metro branch had recently passed a motion calling on the education minister to restore boards' "authority and responsibility to set a budget appropriate to district needs, along with the authority to tax accordingly," by July 1985. They also demanded that the minister set January-to-June 1985 budgets at "at least 1984 service levels plus an inflation factor."

Boards in the metro branch include Vancouver, North Vancouver, West Vancouver, Burnaby, Coquitlam, New Westminster, Delta, Surrey and Richmond.

The other positive development was that in at least 11 districts — Vancouver, Victoria, Lillooet, Campbell River, Comox, Prince George, Cowichan, Vancouver Island North, North Vancouver, Smithers, and Hope — the recent school

board elections gave pro-education trustees majority control. The most heartening results were in Vancouver, where progressive trustees now hold 5 of 9 seats, Lillooet, where progressives hold 3 of 5, and North Vancouver where the dominance is 6 to one. In Prince George, one pro-education candidate topped the polls.

Bilingualism boosted in executive decision

French language programs in B.C. schools are in dire need of expansion and improvement, the BCTF Executive Committee has decided.

The executive came to this conclusion and adopted a plan for remedying the situation after receiving a series of recommendations from the Executive Subcommittee on French Language. The subcommittee was particularly critical of the too-heavy concentration on French immersion programs and the inadequacy of elementary French instruction.

As a first step, the executive agreed to recommend to the RA that policy statement 9.A.13 — endorsing universal access to instruction in either official language where student numbers make it feasible — be reaffirmed.

The executive then adopted three key motions urging that:

- in addition to immersion programs, second language learning programs in both official languages be implemented "which will provide students with the opportunity to develop from an early age facility in a second language;"

- *Programme Cadre* not be offered in place of French immersion but be available, as intended, for francophone children;

- B.C. universities and the ministry, in consultation with the BCTF, develop inservice retraining programs for teachers in second language instruction in both official languages.

PD Associates to offer Peace education workshops

The BCTF will continue its efforts to foster peace education in B.C. schools.

The Executive Committee took this decision at its November meeting after receiving reports that teaching about peace is still not widely organized in schools and that the recent BCTF Peace Education Conference was a big success with participants.

To continue the effort, the executive agreed to recommend actions urging that:

- PD Associates present workshops in peace education;

- BCTF sponsor and organize a Peace Education Conference in 1985-86;

- BCTF and CTF continue to be involved in co-sponsoring conferences such as the Canadian Conference on Nuclear War: The Search for Solutions.

Governance Commission seeks more submissions

The BCTF Executive Committee has given the Commission on Governance an additional year in which to complete its study and make recommendations.

The commission will now submit interim reports to the 1985 Summer Conference and fall Representative Assembly, presenting its final report with recommendations on changes in BCTF governance to the 1986 Annual General Meeting.

The commission, which has presented one discussion paper, intends to use the extra time to take a fresh look at the issue and urges interested groups and individual members to contribute their views on how BCTF decision-making processes could be improved. Submissions should be addressed to the attention of Tom Hutchison, Government Division, BCTF, and should be submitted no later than **March 15, 1985.**

Bentley stresses that the world religions unit is optional — parents are asked to give permission for their child to participate — and that the program does not attempt to tell students what they should and should not believe. The program has been well received by both parents and school board officials.

"We've never yet had one bit of negative feedback from the community in Surrey," said Bentley. "Every parent group I've talked to has been very very supportive."

He has particularly warm praise for the support he received from his former principal, John Holtam, now retired, and the Surrey School Board, which gave him four months leave of absence with pay to develop "Religion of Our Neighbors". He also expresses strong gratitude to Ed May, coordinator of the BCTF's program against racism, for help in funding (with a \$3,000 travel grant) and organizing workshops around the province.

But, above all, Bentley is emphatic that the public school is the ideal place to teach children about religion — to give them exposure to different beliefs, values and customs than their own. "A child who grows up with no exposure or understanding of different religious thought has an incomplete education," he said.

And as for the current controversy over Bible reading in the classroom, Bentley totally rejects the clamour to enforce scripture reading at the beginning of the school day. Aside from the fact that there are too many non-Christians in classrooms today, Bentley says: "There is no point in reading from the Bible unless you can comment on it. It becomes a sterile practice that does a disservice to Christianity."

BCTF to help equip education centre in rural Nicaragua

The BCTF is donating \$5,000 to assist in the equipping of a community education centre in a poor region of Nicaragua.

The grant, for supplies and equipment, will assist the centre in providing secondary classes for children in San Dionisio.

Responding to a recommendation from the W. R. Long Memorial International Solidarity Fund Committee, the Executive Committee agreed to the donation to the Witness for Justice and Peace, a Christian activist organization, which is helping Nicaraguan authorities develop the education centre.

This contribution is in line with current BCTF policy of giving priority to Central America in its aid program. Earlier, the W. R. Long fund gave a \$3,000 grant to the Tools for Peace campaign, which has just sent a shipload of vitally-needed educational, medical, agricultural and industrial supplies to Nicaragua.

Help a colleague — hire an unemployed teacher for that job

Unemployed teachers need work. Many of them have a variety of skills in addition to teaching, such as: carpentry, plumbing, electrical, automotive and small engine repair, appliance repair, furniture repair/upholstery, bicycle repair, gardening, child care, secretarial, glass repair, translating, typing/editing, word and data processing, French and Spanish lessons, piano and guitar lessons. If you or your friends could employ an unemployed teacher in short- or long-term jobs in these or other areas, please contact the Unemployed Teachers' Action Centre at 736-9267 (metro), or toll-free at 112-800-663-9163.

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BCTF Newsletter

BRITISH COLUMBIA TEACHERS' FEDERATION
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CLIVE COCKING Editor

The BCTF Newsletter is published by the B.C. Teachers' Federation pursuant to policy statement 36.26 in the *Members' Guide to the BCTF*. The Newsletter Editorial Advisory Board, which reports to the Executive Committee, serves in an advisory capacity, assisting the editor in interpreting and implementing newsletter policy.

Letters to the editor must be signed by and bear the address of the writer. The Newsletter may edit letters for brevity, clarity, legality or taste. Letters to the editor and signed articles contained herein reflect the views of the authors and do not necessarily express official policy of the BCTF. Unsigned articles are the responsibility of the editor.

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Prime Minister Gandhi appreciates student's expression of sympathy

Burnaby elementary teacher Sharan Ghumman's seven-year-old daughter was upset by the assassination of India Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and on her own initiative wrote to Mrs. Gandhi's son and successor, receiving a very nice reply:

Dear Mr. Rajive Gandhi,

I am sorry you have lost your mommy. I feel sorry for you and for us. My mom says that Mrs. Gandhi was a great lady and some bad man killed her.

Please give my love to your children and tell them I am sorry they have lost their grandma because grandmas are good ladies. I love my grandma very much.

Please be brave and rule India well.

With love,
your friend,

Sonya Ghumman
Grade 2,
Cameron Elementary School,
Burnaby

Dear Sonya:

I was touched by your message. My mother was indeed a great and courageous lady. She loved children. In fact she regarded children as her friends. Scores of young girls around the world were named Indira after her.

Thank you for your good wishes. If the adult members of the Indian community in Canada, irrespective of their language and their religion, follow your example and sink their differences in the interest of strong and united India, what a great source of strength it would be to me and to the people of India at this tragic and difficult time.

Yours sincerely,
Rajive Gandhi
Prime Minister of India



While criticizing the superficiality of the ministry's school review, BCTF President Pat Clarke recently told reporters that the federation would still contribute to the review and press ahead for a more extensive public commission on education.

Trio wins Canadian Studies prize

Three Powell River teachers have recently received a Canadian Studies Prize for Excellence in Teaching. The teachers are Muriel Carriere, Mary James, and Shirley Koleszar.

The federal government prizes acknowledge outstanding teaching in Canadian Studies at the elementary/secondary, community college and university levels.

Carriere, James, and Koleszar were nominated for the award by the B.C. Primary Teachers' Association. One hundred twenty-one nominations were submitted from across the nation in the elementary/secondary category. The three B.C. teachers shared the prize with a Quebec secondary school teacher.

During the past 14 years, Carriere,

James, and Koleszar have developed a broad base of knowledge, experience and expertise in teaching social studies to young children. They began in 1970 as members of the Powell River Project Five to Nine team and worked as part of Project Canada West under the auspices of the Canada Studies Foundation. When that work was completed, the three continued to work as a team, developing new material and presenting workshops for their colleagues. Koleszar was a member of the social studies review and materials selection committees of the Ministry of Education. More recently, all three have acted as consultants to the authors for Douglas and McIntyre, publishers of *Explorations*, the new Canadian Social Studies Program for Elementary Schools.

Vacancies

Applications still sought for Fergusson Award, Finance, Judicial committees

Vacancies for the G. A. Fergusson Memorial Award Trustees and Finance Committee were advertised in the November 9 newsletter. Since that newsletter was held back for reports from the BCTF Parent-Teacher Conference, there was little time for interested teachers to respond. Those appointments will now be made at the January 17-19 Executive Committee meeting; deadline for applications on curriculum vitae forms is now **January 14**.

Judicial Committee (also advertised previously) deadline for applications remains as **January 18**.

Please call Jacquie Boyer at the BCTF if you require more information or curriculum vitae forms.

Library book purchase plan

The ministry's curriculum development branch has asked the BCTF to nominate teacher-librarians to serve two-year terms on the selection committee for the library book purchase plan. Annual responsibilities of BCTF members on the committee are to attend a two or three-day meeting with ministry personnel to identify a list of recommended books for distribution under the plan. Interested teacher-librarians should submit applications on standard BCTF curriculum vitae forms by **January 14**. For detailed information or vitae forms, please call Jacquie Boyer at the BCTF office.

Opinion

Youth sacrificed to political expediency

by Joseph Katz

K. Matsushita, the head of Japan's Matsushita Electric Company, recently outlined the Japanese approach to education and training to a group of visiting American managers. "The intelligence of a handful of technocrats, however brilliant, is no longer enough," he said. "Only by drawing on the brain power of all its employees can a firm face up to the turbulence and constraints of today's environment. This is why our large companies give their employees three to four times more training than yours; this is why they foster within the firm such intensive exchange and communication; this is why they seek constantly everybody's suggestions and why they demand from the educational system increasing numbers of graduates as well as bright and well-educated generalists."

At a recent international congress on education the West German Federal Minister of Education and Science, Dr. Dorothee Wilms, had something similar to say: "We are not in a position to forecast the spiritual, social and cultural conditions in the Federal Republic of Germany, neither do we know what specific qualification requirements by the employment system will be called for. What we do know, however, is the fact that a sound course of training is the most reliable way of equipping young persons with the ability to react flexibly."

These two statements are of particular significance for the people of British Columbia for the essence of the views expressed is that education is absolutely critical to the future of young people and to the nation. These statements are all the more significant when we consider the devastation that is being visited on the educational systems of British Columbia by a government that is excessively parochial in its perceptions.

What many perceive and what the Bennett government appears to ignore is that in today's world education is the bedrock for development. The province can send as many trade missions abroad as it wishes, it can seek to invite high technology to our shores, provide tax-free zones to its heart's content, but few if any

countries will respond with the establishment of manufacturing or processing plants if a good educational system is not available for their employees or a system that can supply them with the technological skills needed.

What the province needs, and needs desperately, is a comprehensive plan for the development of the educational systems so that they can be ready for the 21st century — now just 15 years away. The generation now in secondary school will be graduating from colleges and universities at that time. The province can no longer afford the kind of 18th century thought that has been guiding the educational system in B.C. into a morass. Jack Heinrich, the Minister of Education, and Pat McGeer, the Minister of Education, Science and Technology, need to exercise their responsibility for their respective portfolios and either convince the government that education must have a higher priority than it has been given — or resign their portfolios — thus drawing the attention of the government to the seriousness of the situation.

What these two ministers should do, at the very least, is convince the Bennett government that a Royal Commission on Education is necessary. The White Paper was a fiasco, the introduction of provincial exams was a disaster and present School Act review is little more than tinkering with a system that is in need of a major overhaul.

There are many, many reasons why a Royal Commission on Education is needed, and although Heinrich has rejected the idea out-of-hand and McGeer appears to have been silent on the matter, second looks may alter the picture. There is no mechanism that could do as thorough a job as an intelligent commission to prepare B.C. for its meeting with destiny. The Chant and Macdonald commissions both stand as clear evidence that commissions can show the way to a better future. Here are a few reasons why the people of B.C. should demand a Royal Commission on Education be appointed:

- There has not been a comprehensive examination of B.C.'s educational systems since the Chant Com-

mission in 1960 and the Macdonald Commission in 1962;

- In the past 22 years there have been changes in the character and distribution of the population in the province, and in the character of the social, economic, and cultural ethos;

- There is need to evaluate the administrative structures of education, including the ministries themselves and the Universities Council of B.C., in order to assess the degree to which these are efficient or inefficient;

- There is need to examine the balance between general and technical education and to identify the best ways in which to ensure that each student achieves his or her potential in either sphere;

- There is need to justify the operations of the Open Learning Institute and the Knowledge Network on their own merits and at the same time assess the validity of their expenditures and roles in the overall system of education in the province;

- There is need, too, to decentralize educational decision-making in the province — presently concentrated in the ministries — by returning a measure of autonomy to school boards and boards of governors of higher educational institutions;

- There is need to examine the way in which the provincial government distributes — or does not distribute — federal monies it receives for education;

- There is need to examine teacher education programs and the role played by continuing education centres.

It has been said, and said truly, that where there is no vision the people perish. In British Columbia at the present moment young people are perishing for the lack of vision and of will in the two ministries of education and in the provincial government as a whole. The hopes, ambitions and aspirations of a whole generation of youth are being sacrificed on the altar of political expediency, an expediency that has a set of priorities so completely wrong that it is beyond comprehension to reasonable men and women.

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