

newsletter

BRITISH COLUMBIA TEACHERS' FEDERATION

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Broadley says:

Why shouldn't teachers withdraw their services on the Canadian Labour Congress Day of Protest, October 14?

To start with, there is a distinction between the CLC objective and its tactic.

The objective of the CLC is to have the wage control program terminated. We are united with the CLC in this objective as shown by the 1976 AGM which overwhelmingly opposed the government's wage control program. The AGM also increased the BCTF fee to \$200, an increase of \$53, to ensure resources were available to oppose programs such as wage controls. And the evidence continues to accumulate that free collective bargaining has virtually disappeared in Canada.

To restore free collective bargaining, organizations such as the BCTF must take continued and effective collective action. But what tactics should we use?

The CLC has chosen the national day of protest as a tactic. While this tactic depends on collective action, how will it achieve the objective — restoration of the freedom to engage in meaningful collective bargaining? What will be

different October 15? October 16? In November? In 1977?

The tactic will provide a dramatic focus for employee opposition to controls. But who doesn't know the position of employees already?

Perhaps the tactic will help to destroy the credibility of the Liberal government. Hardly. Latest opinion polls show there is almost nothing left to destroy.

I am more concerned that the day of protest will add to the credibility of government by giving it the opportunity to show how it could stand up to the 'big labor bosses.' That would detract from the achievement of our objective by leaving government more secure in its position.

I also look at the cost to members. More than \$2,500,000 would be lost in wages for that

Bill Broadley is BCTF President.

day, a sum exceeding total federation expenditures for more than six months. Would we get \$2,500,000 value for our lost money? I think not.

What we do need are tactics which continue for more than a day, tactics which raise the economic literacy of us all but particularly MPs and MLAs,

tactics which can use the united collective action of our 28,000 members.

We have not developed lobbying techniques which are effective enough. Some of the BCTF fee increase — more than half a days pay — should be used to develop sound economic expertise to challenge government statements about the national and provincial economy. We need to stop relying on economic experts in government.

For years the BCTF has relied on united collective action to achieve its objectives. Salary bargaining rights enjoyed by all B.C. teachers until the advent of controls are a direct result of teachers uniting in collective action.

The united, collective action of B.C. teachers in 1970 when we staged a one-day strike to seek improved pensions for retired colleagues eventually paid off. Members were committed to the action because they were informed of the issue and made the decision themselves.

In 1972, with collective bargaining rights again in jeopardy, and after much debate, teachers united in action that

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Walmsley says:

Why do I support the October 14 Day of Protest? Why am I going to give up one day's pay?

I have met very few teachers who take the position they will never strike no matter what. Most agree that strike is the strongest action in a series of escalating actions. They concur that if things get bad enough there is no alternative but strike.

I accept this majority position. I have never argued that we should strike over every issue . . . or that we should strike over most or even many issues. In fact, this is the first time since the 1971 pensions strike that I have urged withdrawal of teacher services.

I believe this one is necessary. We have exhausted our options.

The federal government has placed us and virtually every other organized employee under wage controls. Our contracts are to be autocratically dealt with by the Anti-Inflation Board. We will have no say in that board's decisions. Based on experience so far, any appeals will result in further roll-backs. Neither the AIB nor the administrator is impartial. Both have been given dictatorial power to enforce an arbitrary set of percentage figures. The AIB is not an arbitration board. There will be no input from both sides and then a 'just' settlement imposed. The rules have been set by the gov-

ernment and will be enforced by a biased 'umpire.'

We no longer bargain with our employer with both sides accepting a commitment to the final agreement. Now we bargain with the uncertainty of the anti-inflation legislation always over us. Neither side can really believe that the other is bargaining in good faith because neither side can deliver.

It is certain that some teachers' salaries will be rolled back as early as September 30. Some school boards will anticipate the AIB's decisions; others will follow them. After the AIB rolled back the salaries of the hospital workers from 14% to 8%, can we really believe that our salaries will remain untouched?

The present federal government has destroyed free collective bargaining and removed a fundamental democratic right.

It has been said that democracy is the worst form of gov-

Don Walmsley is BCTF 1st Vice-President.

ernment . . . until one considers the alternatives. So it is with free collective bargaining.

In the present situation it must be clear that the enemy is not the local school board that employs us. It is the federal government and our provincial government that placed us under the controls.

We have fought this legislation since it was announced. We have sent letters and telegrams and delegations to both governments. We have lobbied MLAs and MPs. We have issued press releases. We have attempted to inform our governments, to reason with them. So far, we have made no impact.

Some people are suggesting that we contribute money to a political party that will remove the controls. But which party? The Conservatives fought the last election on the plank that wage controls were essential. The Liberals fought the last election on the basis of clearly stated opposition to controls as their major election promise . . . and then imposed them. The NDP has a schizophrenic policy: federally opposed and provincially in favor. Where do we turn? Where are these 'more effective means' of fighting controls?

Let's look briefly at some past examples of teacher collective action.

The BCTF pensions strike in 1971 cost us over \$1 million in lost salaries. But it was a sound investment that led to vastly improved pensions, a greater responsiveness of government, mass action in the following provincial election, removal of salary limits and a solid feeling of teacher worth. Some teachers claimed that we were

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Executive supports CLC Protest Day, calls meetings

On August 30, 1976, our BCTF Executive Committee attempted to establish a position with respect to the CLC October 14 Day of Protest. Discussion prior to adjournment was inconclusive.

This topic was given priority at the September 11 meeting. Several recommendations were endorsed. These are given below.

1. That the Executive Committee support the October 14 Day of Protest, including the withdrawal of services.
2. That with respect to the October 14 Day of Protest, the BCTF Executive Committee recognizes the right of local associations to determine local association action and encourages local associations to hold general meetings to determine their action with respect to the October 14 Day of Protest.
3. The BCTF Executive Committee further recommends that at such general meetings any decision by a local association to withdraw services be determined by a secret ballot.
4. That it would be desirable to invite union representatives to such general meetings to provide information concerning the Day of Protest.
5. That the BCTF support legally and morally local associations or individual members who withdraw services on October 14. It was noted that support does not include reimbursement of the one day's pay if pay is deducted.
6. That members be given information re their legal position with respect to action they may wish to take on October 14 and, further, that they be given information relevant to precedent concerning the withdrawal of services by teachers in B.C.
7. That local associations be urged to contact their school boards with a view to obtaining a commitment from their board to the effect that no punitive action will be taken against teachers who withdraw services on October 14, 1976. It was noted that deduction of one day's pay would not be interpreted as punitive action.
8. That BCTF Executive Committee respect the right of the individual member to dissent from a majority decision of his/her local association with respect to action on October 14.
9. That local associations be informed that materials are available in quantity from the Canadian Labor Congress regarding the Day of Protest.

Legal considerations

A teacher's contract of employment requires attendance on all prescribed school days. Unauthorized absence is not permitted and such would constitute a prima facie breach of Regulation 86 of the Public Schools Act. Unauthorized absence can be classified as neglect of duty which is cause for dismissal proceedings.

In the past school boards in British Columbia have not elected to dismiss teachers who have refused to cross a picket line or who have engaged in concerted action involving a withdrawal of services.

When large numbers of people are involved wholesale dismissal actions are unwieldy and selective dismissal actions would be discriminatory. Moreover, a decision to respect a picket line has an ingredient of personal conscience and conviction. The school board of the most populous school district in the province has a policy that no punitive action other than loss of pay shall arise from an absence resulting from the observation of picket lines.

Neither the BCTF Executive Committee nor any local association has any authority, express or implied, to require teachers to breach their contracts of employment by not working on a prescribed school day. A decision by a teacher to work or to be absent is personal and voluntary.

The federal controls program was implemented in an attempt to stop or reverse an upward trend in the inflation rate.

The program is founded in the belief that escalating inflation is the result of a wage push, that rising wages and salaries have been the cause of rising costs.

If the program holds down wages, it will hold down costs and thereby control inflation. So goes the argument.

We reject this explanation of inflation. Between 1971 and 1974 incomes for wage earners in this country increased an average of 25%. During the same period, housing costs rose an average of 65%, mortgage interest increased by 32%, food costs rose 49%, and corporate profits increased by 111%! It appears there is a common base to all these increases, but it is not wages.

There is ample evidence to indicate that a more likely cause of inflation in Canada (and in the markets Canadians trade), is an imbalance in the supply and demand situation for the world energy market.

Those suppliers (OPEC) who represent the balance of power in the world energy market became aware of their strategic market position, and took advantage of the situation by acting in concert to increase significantly the price of oil. This is, and has been, the primary cause for the current inflationary trends in European, American and Pacific Rim markets, all of which are major trading areas for Canadian goods.

The inflationary impact on this country dominates all other influences because we rely on our exports to support our affluent life style. Of further consequence is the fact that our sales (in many countries) represent marginal goods therefore our sales are first to be cut and the last to pick up.

Of particular concern to British Columbia is the market for forest products.

The market in USA and Canada for lumber has been greatly affected by a drying up of mortgage money, a side effect of the energy crisis. This huge flow of monies to the OPEC countries has diverted funds normally channelled into American money markets. OPEC countries do not have the financial machinery which could make these funds available to the housing industry in the USA eastern seaboard. The area has been a major consumer of B.C. lumber but is now a very depressed market. This, of course, depresses our major industry.

Broadley says:

successfully restored these rights.

In 1976, as we seek the restoration of free collective bargaining, I see a move away from the united action that has served teachers well in the past. But we need unity.

Wage controls are a provincial action and thus a provincial, not local issue. The most

effective expression of united collective action for the BCTF would have been provincial action determined by all teachers. This has been rejected in favor of 79 separate decisions by locals — hardly the way to show a united front.

Even these local decisions will not be made by all teachers unless they attend the general meeting. Alternatively, those members at the meeting could insist on a ballot for all members of the local.

The commitment needed for united collective action in the local to withdraw or not withdraw services is greater when each member has participated in the decision-making process. (In fact, this is one of the

basic arguments we use to support collegial decision-making in schools.)

When all have participated in making a decision, most people in the minority are prepared to unite and act with the majority. Such unity makes collective action powerful.

Of course, persons should not be asked to make decisions without access to information. BCTF Wage Control Monitors, the BCTF Newsletter, and association meetings have provided members with considerable information over an extended period of time about the wage control program.

I prefer not to have members make a decision based on the level of adrenalin in their

bloodstream at a particular moment in a meeting. I'd rather that they went away and thought for awhile about the various arguments they've heard and read. Then they can vote with both heart and mind. And they will be committed to the decision.

I find it repugnant to suggest that the only way one can make an informed decision on the matter of withdrawing services is to hear the debate at a meeting.

I am preposed to act and withdraw services if that is what the majority of all teachers want.

Are those who support withdrawal of services prepared to act and not withdraw services

if that is what the majority want?

Organized labor is our friend. We have many common causes. But teachers must make their own decisions. The best friends recognize each other's rights to disagree without destroying their common interest.

I give first priority to the unity of our members in achieving BCTF objectives of promoting the cause of education and the status and welfare of teachers. We need to focus on unified action on how to achieve our objective and not tear ourselves apart arguing about a tactic determined by a separate organization, the Canadian Labour Congress.

Bill Broadley

By JURD KIRBY,
Director, Economic Welfare

Against a background of world-wide inflation caused by imbalances in the energy and money market Canadian governments choose to try to stop the workings of those overriding forces by controlling wages and profits.

One might predict, based on our earlier experience with the Prices and Incomes Commission under Commissioner John Young, that the following events will happen:

- * Profits are reduced with the result that capital investment will decrease.
- * New job creation will drop and unemployment will increase.
- * Growth in the gross national product will level off.
- * Government revenues will drop as profits decrease, incomes level off, and there is reduced employment; subsequently, more workers will require unemployment benefit and social assistance.
- * Governments at all levels will find cash flows do not meet budget requirements and government debts will climb or services will have to be cut back.

One would expect that senior governments faced with these prospects would be attempting to 'prime the pump.' They would be encouraging capital investment in the energy field and be building a structure to support an aggressive sales force within the OPEC market. Instead we have a control program.

What is happening as a result of the program? Workers see it as:

- * A force to rollback collective agreements;
- * A process which provides no effective participation or appeal for employee groups;
- * A process which has a reputation for rough justice but probably is not just at all, except in the grossest sense;
- * A force which threatens to destroy the collective bargaining system;
- * A system which will create new inequities in the income situations of workers in all parts of the country;

Management sees it as:

- * A force to stifle enterprise;
- * A way to reduce profits and restrict the flow of expansionary funds into the country;
- * A deterrent to the creation of new jobs.

Teachers see it as another misguided attempt to solve the economic problems of the country by political controls. We have experienced these inept efforts before by governments who wish to impose from the top, simple arbitrary bureaucratic controls onto a complex economic and social situation. Each time they failed. Each time teachers, along with many other groups, were the ones who suffered for the government's poor judgment.

Let's be clear about the situation.

There is a major economic problem facing Canada and British Columbia. Teachers are prepared to help seek and support a reasonable solution to that problem but we cannot see sense or justice in the current program. In fact, we believe the present controls can only make the economy worse and at the same time destroy some traditional democratic processes like collective bargaining.

We are more concerned with the destruction of freedom than we are the threat to our economic status.

If we look at the control system it seems to be a parody of our legal system. There are a number of steps for processing salary and wage increases each more repressive or narrower than the preceding one. Each has little or no effective provision for employee participation.

Consider teachers' situations which may provide a classic example of the unfairness of the controls.

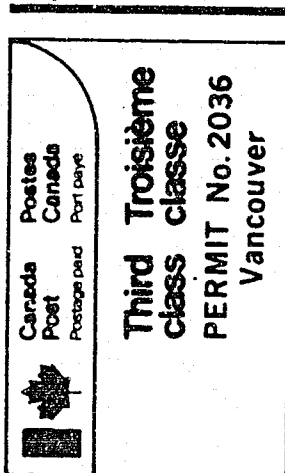
Teachers went through a legislated process last year to determine 1976 salaries which resulted, in most cases, in compulsory binding arbitration — the only group in the province under such a restraint.

Teachers' salaries that came into effect last January averaged 12.4% which was below the 17.9% average being gained by others in the province at that time.

Six months later the provincial government placed the public sector under the AIB. Now all 1976 contracts must go through the AIB at a time when the provincial law dictates we are to negotiate contracts for 1977.

We now find these awards are to be subjected to at least one further arbitration and one where we have no effective participation.

That move, in our opinion, is a thinly disguised cop-out by the provincial government. It places our economic status in double or triple jeopardy. It makes the legislated process for salary determination irrelevant.



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

Walmsley says:

'wasting our money,' that we were only helping our employers balance their budgets. I suspect that those teachers now on pension know differently. They — and we — will collect tens of millions in improved pensions as a result of that strike.

The Powell River teachers' strike in 1969 provided the push for negotiating their Learning Conditions Contract.

The Coquitlam teachers' strike in 1974 gave teachers the impetus to reject the B.C. School Trustees' provincial bargaining thrust.

The Surrey teachers' strike in 1974 led to the provincial government's commitment to reduce the provincial pupil / teacher ratio by one and

one-half pupils each year for three years... a commitment that has cost the government over \$170 million to date. Did the Surrey teachers 'waste their money' that day?

The October 14 Day of Protest will have similar effects. October 14 will lead to further actions and those actions will lead to change.

Oh, nothing will be noticeably changed on October 15. The controls will still be there. But the people will have spoken and the government will have heard. When over one million workers give up over \$50 million in salaries, a lot of people will listen. Until now, not too many people have realized what is at stake. After October 14, they will.

There has never before been a national day of protest of this

magnitude. Effects of October 14 will be felt long after the day is over.

Those who protest on October 14 will realize that, ultimately, they can have an undeniable effect on government.

There will be a fundamental change in the attitude of the employees of Canada toward a government that puts their interests so low and those of business so high. If the controls can be removed so that profits are exempted for Canadian investments, they can be removed for employee groups as well.

We do not have impeachment or recall laws in Canada so we are forced to take other means to control our elected governments.

There can be no respect for a government that passes unjust

laws because an unjust law is no law at all.

No wonder the federal government is putting \$1.2 million into an advertising campaign to 'prove' the controls are working. No wonder they are saying that the October 14 Day of Protest is negative and will be fruitless. No wonder Dr. Pat McGeer says he hopes teachers will act 'responsibly' on October 14.

We are almost into our second year of controls and we have less purchasing power than last year. There is no guarantee that wage controls will not continue beyond three years. We must force the removal of controls.

I will be a part of the October 14 Day of Protest. I will lose a day's pay. I can't afford not to.

Don Walmsley