

Saturday, June 21: Education: Privatization through the back door

Responsibility for public services shifting to private domain

JUNE 20, 2014



Kids at University Hill Secondary work in their classes in Vancouver on February 25, 2014.

Photograph by: wayne leidenfrost, PNG

For the first 100 years of B.C. history there was no public funding of private or religious schools. The Social Credit government introduced public funding of private education in 1977 and only then did enrolment in private schools increase, taking a larger share of the provincial education budget.

Since the BC Liberals ascended to power, we have been subjected to a steady stream of ideologically driven public policy decisions that shift responsibility for providing and financing public services from the public to the private domain. As with other public assets, their aim is to privatize the commonwealth of the province. This is consistent with the ideology of the BC Liberals and the corporate media that supports reducing taxes on the wealthy and corporations and cutting public spending for social services.

Privatizing public enterprises, goods, and services is usually done in the name of increased efficiency, but mainly has the effect of 1) concentrating wealth in fewer hands (the gap between the wealthiest and the majority of B.C. families has grown dramatically the past 30 years) and 2) making the public pay more for its needs (see, for example, BC Ferries).

Not unlike charter schools in the U.S., public funding of private schools in B.C. is privatization through the back door. Elite private schools are subsidized by the public, while public schools are told to look to the market — recruiting tuition paying international students, setting up school district business companies, opening their doors to corporate programs and parent fundraising — to solve a budget crisis imposed by government's distorted priorities.

Private school enrolment is soaring because it is encouraged by public policies that divert public money to support private interests and by ideologies that promote individualism and private gain over community and shared interests.

Public funding for private schools is at odds with creating a more equitable, just, and democratic society.

E. WAYNE ROSS, PHD, Professor, Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy, UBC

Deal with BCTF once and for all

Education is the responsibility of the provincial government and no one else. That includes establishing curriculum, setting the standards for its delivery, and monitoring the performance of every school in B.C. That is the function of the Ministry of Education and its regional superintendents. No aspect of that responsibility should be compromised or delegated to any other body, especially to a closed shop labour union such as the BCTF.

When I was Minister of Education, a strike by teachers was unthinkable, not just by the government, but by the teachers. But if a walkout had taken place during my watch, my recommendation would have been to deal with the strikers the same way Ronald Reagan dealt with the air traffic controllers. Thank them for their service and hire replacements.

Teachers have been well treated in British Columbia. That is why so many young people are hoping to enter it as a profession. There are not enough teaching positions in B.C. for all the students graduating with teaching degrees in this province. Well over half will never have a chance to be one. Getting a job as a teacher in B.C. is a privilege in itself.

The atmosphere of confrontation which pervades our school system today, demeans teachers and handicaps students. How can teachers take pride in their work when their union demands they abandon their students?

The government must not only deal with the impasse in labour negotiations, it must cure the problem permanently. That requires two steps. The first is to pass legislation declaring education an essential service and strikes impermissible. The second is to eliminate the requirement of membership in the BCTF to be a condition for teaching in a B.C. public school. Such moves are bound to be controversial, but they are the only way health can be restored to public education in our province.

PATRICK L. MCGEER, Kinsmen Laboratory of Neurological Research, UBC

Cutbacks hurt special needs kids

When we as a society decided we wanted children with special needs to be included in regular school classrooms, it was made clear these children would be supported by special education aides. No one dreamed the aides would be cut back again and again. Not only do the children with special needs suffer, but so do the teachers and all the rest of the children.

The Liberal government took great pride in decreasing our taxes. However, since this government holds that we cannot afford good education conditions for all our children, perhaps that decrease was a mistake.

JANE SHOEMAKER, Coquitlam

Teachers pay demands not unreasonable

We are writing to express our great disappointment in the lack of progress in the contract talks between the teachers and the province.

Teachers have been given no increases in salary or benefits in years and deserve adequate compensation on par with teachers in other provinces in Canada. They want to meet the diverse needs of their students. They cannot teach well when they have large classes, less than adequate assistance, and inadequate funding.

Please give our public school students a chance to have a high-quality education!

LINDA AND CHARLES PICCIOTTO, Victoria

I retired from teaching in 2001. My Bachelor of Education degree (five years at the University of Victoria) plus 35 years of teaching in secondary schools in North Vancouver, provided an annual 2001 salary of \$60,113. What if I had continued to teach until this year (2014)? My annual salary this year would have been \$76,220.52. That is a 13 year increase of 26.8 per cent, about two per cent per year.

Compare this to a B.C. member of the legislature (MLA). In 2001 my MLA received a salary of \$72,100. An MLA now receives a salary of \$101,859. Over 13 years, an MLA enjoyed a salary increase of 41.3 per cent.

How about our B.C. premier? The premier's salary in 2001 was \$117,000. Christy Clark is the happy recipient of a 2014 annual salary of \$193,532. That's an increase of 65.4 per cent in 13 years.

Do you find this fair? Christy Clark thinks it is fair. I don't.

STU MCDONALD, Gibsons

Clark's sincerity suspect

Clark's sincerity about her desire for a fair contract is suspect given the B.C. Supreme Court's finding of her government's previous bad-faith bargaining and attempts to provoke a teachers' strike while at the same time claiming to care so much about keeping schools open.

Christy Clark was willing to meet with Vancouver truckers to bring about their contract settlement, but has refused BCTF President Jim Iker's request for her direct involvement.

GILBERT SMITH, Vancouver

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