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BRITISH COLUMBIA OBSTRUCTS THE SHOCK DOCTRINE: STRUGGLE, SOLIDARITY, AND POPULAR RESISTANCE

The 2014/2015 school year had a rocky start in British Columbia, Canada, where teachers and the ruling government have been locked in a contest over the future of public education in the province. Teachers finished the 2013/2014 school year locked out and on strike, and neither the teachers nor the government appeared willing to concede defeat. This clash between public and private values offers meaningful lessons for friends of public education.

The struggle over maintaining public services is not unique to British Columbia (BC), of course, and Naomi Klein's (2007) notion of shock doctrines provides a lens for understanding how and why public services around the world have been attacked and subverted via [manufactured] 'crises'. In *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Klein argues that shocks and disasters can disrupt societies' "ruling narratives" and can – if given half a chance – be turned into opportunities for profit-grabbing and corporate re-structuring. Klein provides numerous examples from around the world to show that shock doctrines have been managed and cultivated in order to create "orchestrated raids on the public sphere" (p. 26). Klein's analysis can be extended to BC, where the provincial government has nurtured the spread of privatized education – at the expense of public schools.

I have previously argued that the shock doctrine is alive and well in BC, and involves a broad attack on teachers and the "tacit re-imagining of public education as a vehicle for private profit as well as the intentional re-direction of public resources to redistribute the burden of risk, access, and service to favour private profits over public need" (Steeves, 2014, p. 10). This includes preferential resourcing for private schools in BC, a push to direct public resources away from the provision of learning opportunities and toward a concern with extracting profit, and the systematic commodification of BC's curriculum. To update and supplement this analysis, I would like to: (i) elaborate on the contexts that compelled BC's teachers into rejecting shock therapy and to mount a full-scale strike, (ii) outline some of the impediments to (re)solving the bargaining impasse between teachers and the provincial government, (iii) describe key features of the collective agreement that bridged the impasse between teachers and the provincial government, and (iv) highlight some of the tactics that were used to challenge shock therapy and to cultivate shock resistance in BC.

Setting a Stage: Governance in BC

Labour negotiations are often rocky affairs, but BC's teachers have had a particularly difficult time with the BC Liberals (BCLiberals) – the province's current ruling party. Simply put: teachers in BC have found it difficult to negotiate a collective agreement with a government that broke laws to cut services from kids.

The BCLiberals were recently re-elected by less than 25% of the province's eligible voters (*Vancouver Sun*, 2013), and BC's Supreme Court has twice ruled that they illegally stripped teachers' contracts (BCTF v. BC, 2014; BCTF v. BC, 2011). In 2014, for instance, the Court (BCTF v. BC) ruled that "it was unconstitutional for the government to have legislatively deleted the Working Conditions clauses from the [teachers'] existing collective agreement in 2002 and by prohibiting a return to those clauses" [¶138]. Further, the Court found that government representatives' "understanding of problems was based on unsubstantiated hearsay" [¶236]. The Court also determined that "government representatives were not willing to engage in real dialogue" [¶218], and

concluded that the government did not negotiate in good faith ... One of the problems was that the government representatives were pre-occupied by another strategy. Their strategy was to put such pressure on the union that it would provoke a strike by the union. The government representatives thought this would give government the opportunity to gain political support for imposing legislation on the union. (BCTF v. BC, 2014, Summary, p. 3).

In other words, the ruling party of BC was weighed in a court of law and found to have used kids to push a political agenda.

In addition, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has ruled a handful of times against the BCLiberals – declaring multiple pieces of legislation illegal under international law (e.g., ILO, 2006, 2004, 2003). Overall, the ILO has ruled that six pieces of legislation imposed by the BCLiberals violate international agreements (BC Teachers' Federation, 2014a). To put it another way, the United Nations agency that looks over labour standards and advocates on behalf of justice for workers and decent work for all has positioned BC's ruling government as flouting international treaties to push its political agenda.

Mapping The BCLiberals' Policy Agenda: Shock Therapy as Popular Mandate?

This rapid succession of legislative and judicial interventions is consistent with what Klein (2007) describes as shocks: "moment[s] where there is a gap between fast moving events and the information that exists to explain them" (p. 552). During these times, Klein argues, many of us become "intensely vulnerable to those people who are ready to take advantage of the chaos for their own ends" (p. 552). Specifically, these gaps provide spaces for shock doctrines – 'miracles born of massacres' that unleash "radical free-market makeovers" (p. 232). Since taking government in 2001, the BCLiberals have capitalized on shocks and pushed a shock doctrine to "open up new vistas" (Klein, 2007, p. 364) of unequal access to services.

For instance, while breaking laws and cutting services from kids, the BCLiberals also pushed policies that are of dubious value to the public. Between 2002 and 2005, the BCLiberals closed 85% of the legal aid offices throughout BC, cut supports for family law by 60%, and eliminated all aid for poverty law services and human rights complaints (PovNet, 2010). Eliminating supports for legal services is best understood as a facet in an "orchestrated raid on the public sphere" (Klein, 2007, p. 26). These policy choices "redistribute the burden of risk, access, and service to favour corporate profit over public need" (Steeves, 2014, p. 9).

The BCLiberals also seem to take it as a matter of honour that the province has among the lowest corporate tax rates in North America – and the world (BC Trade and Invest, n.d.). Add to this the fact that BC's child labour laws have been described as among the "most neglectful in the world" (Bakan, 2011), and this provides a context for understanding how corporations in BC could generate \$25.8 billion in profits in 2013 (McMartin, 2012). It also provides a basis for understanding figures from Statistics Canada which show BC as leading Canada in: child poverty (20.7%), the worst poverty rate for children living in single mother families (49.8%), and the most unequal distribution of income among rich and poor families with children (First Call, 2013).

Nevertheless, in 2009 the BCLiberals cut \$16 million in funding for StudentAid BC, which provides loans to students seeking post secondary education (Fehr, 2009). And thanks to the BCLiberals' policies, BC

now has the highest student loan interest rates in Canada (Macdonald & Shaker, 2012, p. 32). And it is also worth highlighting the fact that BC's post secondary students now pay more in tuition than the government collects in corporate taxes (CNW, 2010).

In addition to policies that redistribute the burden of risk, the BCLiberals have also favoured private profits over public needs by advancing a dubious notion of what is and is not 'affordable'. After 'investing' more than \$6 billion for the Olympics (Mackin, 2013), the BCLiberals also pushed for a new roof on BC Place stadium. The initial budget called for \$365 million; but, in the end, the roof's budget topped \$517 million (Mackin, 2014). We should also recall that back in 2012 the BCLiberals gave government staffers an average wage increase of 10% (CBC News, 2012b). And we should not forget that for the 2011/2012 fiscal year, BC's Premier charged around \$475,000 in expenses to credit cards – including a \$3,200+ tab at an oyster bar (CBC News, 2012a). More recently, in 2013, BCHydro – a provincially owned, Crown corporation – was sued by the state of California for price gouging during the 2000-2001 power crisis. The BCLiberals – hoping to avoid a fine that could top \$3.2 billion – managed to find the resources to agree to a \$750 million out-of-court settlement (Cox, 2013). All things considered, it is not at all apparent that teachers' appeal for increased funding for public education is beyond the province's "zone of affordability".

Against this backdrop, it is worth highlighting the fact that in 2012 the BCLiberals sat in legislature – which is to say, took on the official work of elected representatives – for a grand total of 19 days (Jarvis, 2013b). By late 2013, the BC legislature had sat for 36 of the last 579 days (Jarvis, 2013a).

It takes a creative reading on 'democracy' to consider an absentee government that pushes dubious policies and flouts laws while imposing vicious cuts to public services as grounded in a 'popular mandate'. Nevertheless, with the expiry of their collective agreement in 2012, teachers were compelled into bargaining with the BCLiberals.

A Contest of Scripts: Shock Therapy vs. Shock Resistance

The preceding context provides a basis for understanding the bargaining impasse between teachers and the BCLiberals as a competition over the 'script' for the future of BC. Whereas the tactics employed by the BCLiberals appear to be guided by a vision of BC that is grounded in private interests and shock doctrine tactics, the teachers of BC have taken a principled stand for a vision of the future that cultivates shock resistance and is grounded in the collective pursuit of the common good.

Undemocratic Governance: Outlining the BCLiberals' Tactics and Values

The BCLiberals' tactics for engaging with teachers illustrate a vision of governance that relies on an undemocratic balance of power. As a prime example, in 2001 it was reported that the BCLiberals began planning the "cuts of hundreds of millions of dollars a year, massive teacher layoffs, larger classes and less support for students with special needs" (Lambert, 2011). To address the fear that parents would be "apt to notice significant reductions in service levels" government representatives were given a tactic for overcoming this dilemma: "run silent, run deep" in order to avoid provoking parents (Lambert, 2011). In other words, government officials in BC conspired to push through policies and cuts to services that they assumed parents might not like.

The BCLiberals' excessively autocratic vision of governance is also implicit in government representatives' (dis)respect for the law. For example, the BCLiberals described a ruling by a well-respected BC Supreme Court judge as an "incorrect interpretation [emphasis added]" (Shaw, 2014). Moreover, after having been ruled in breach of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms – twice – the BCLiberals chose to direct more public funds into appealing the ruling: "upping the ante in [the] festering teachers dispute" (Palmer, 2014). This indicates that for the BCLiberals it may be preferable to flout laws and to use public funds to fight court battles than to resource public education in BC.

The current round of bargaining with teachers provided more recent examples of the BCLiberals' values. For example, after more than a year of bargaining, a framework of negotiations was signed by both teachers and the provincial bargaining agent, British Columbia Public School Employers' Association [BCPSEA]. To celebrate this success, the BCLiberals fired the [democratically elected] board of BCPSEA and replaced it with a CEO (BC Gov, 2013). Once installed, the new CEO unilaterally scrapped the previously agreed to framework of negotiations and the talks resumed under a lead negotiator described as "angry, disrespectful, and confrontational" (Hyslop, 2014). These interventions do not appear to have been aimed at securing a negotiated settlement with teachers and suggest that the BCLiberals may have intentionally and systematically undercut the possibility of a negotiated settlement.

The BCLiberals also used 'pressure tactics' that appear to have been aimed at provoking – if not punishing – teachers. To put pressure on teachers to concede to the government's proposals, teachers were locked out of schools: Teachers were "directed" to come to schools no earlier than 45 minutes before the start of the day, to be off-site during lunch, to refrain from providing any learning supports for students during breaks or lunch, and to leave schools no later than 45 minutes after the last bell (Chow, 2014). This lockout was used as justification for cutting teachers' pay by 10%. The government argued that since teachers were doing less work, they deserved less pay – "reduced pay for reduced work" (Ip, 2014). However, the government-imposed lockout was functionally a cut in pay for work that teachers' normally volunteer. As a result, the lockout and pay cut was a bit like trying to put out a fire with gasoline: It did not pressure teachers to make concessions at the bargaining table but did confuse pretty much everyone (BCTF, 2014b) – and it provoked teachers to escalate their job action.

In addition to the imposition of a lockout and a cut in pay, in September 2014 the BCLiberals (re)directed public funds to pay parents \$40 per day to keep children out of schools. With schools closed due to teachers' job action, the BCLiberals directed parents to apply for a daily cash subsidy through a website (www.bcparentinfo.ca). Only children under the age of thirteen were eligible, and all payouts were held until the impasse was resolved (Shaw & Carman, 2014). This unprecedented tactic illustrated the BCLiberals' intention to use any and all means to outlast teachers' resolve and to push teachers into concessions.

Concessions and Control: Unpacking the BCLiberals' Proposals for Teachers

Another way the BCLiberals tried to push teachers into concessions was by tabling proposals that asked teachers to give up on court rulings that run counter to the government's policy objectives. For example, BCPSEA tabled language that would allow either party to dissolve the entire collective agreement if they were unhappy with the outcome of the government's appeal of BCTF v. BC (2014):

[I]f either party is dissatisfied with the outcome [of the appeal] ... Within 60 days of the ultimate judicial decision, either party may give written notice to the other of termination of the collective agreement. (BCPSEA, 2014c)

It seems unlikely that teachers would have reason to dissolve a collective agreement that took more than a year of difficult bargaining and sustained job action to secure. On the other hand, should the government lose its appeal of BCTF v. BC (2014), this language – a 'loser wins' clause – would allow the government the means to dissolve the entire collective agreement and initiate another round of bargaining. All things considered, there seems to be little obvious incentive for teachers to cede this power to government or to sign a 'contingent' contract.

This 'loser wins' clause was eventually pulled, but the government's bargaining agent tabled another proposal that asked teachers to give up on court rulings that returned class size and composition language to their collective agreement. Specifically, BCPSEA (2014b) attempted to "supersede and replace all previous Articles that addressed class size, composition and staffing levels." To extend the metaphor, this proposal might be understood as an attempt to 'get out of jail free'. Jim Iker, President of British Columbia's Teachers' Federation (BCTF), singled out this proposal as a key obstacle to reaching a

negotiated settlement (William-Ross, 2014). And Joel Bakan (2014), a professor who focuses on constitutional law, confided that he saw “a lot of sense” in teachers’ insistence on eliminating this proposal “before commencing bargaining.” Regardless, the proposal conveys a clear sense of the distance between the values that underlie the bargaining objectives of teachers and government.

Another proposal from government asked teachers to cede contractual protections for the evaluation of teachers. Specifically, the BCPSEA tabled language that would “supersede and replace all previous provisions that addressed evaluation and dismissal for performance” (BCPSEA, 2014, p. 3). Teachers previously bargained for language in their collective agreement that followed a ‘professional growth’ model: Teachers were contractually assured that evaluations included multiple administrators and as many as three observations, as well as ample time and opportunity to address concerns and modify practice. Representatives of the government, however, tabled language that replaced “professional growth” with “standards” and “metrics” – imposed by an administrator. Under this language, the issue of how many observations formed the basis of an evaluation cycle was left unclear. This could have provided the possibility for dismissal after one ‘unsatisfactory’ evaluation under one admin. Understandably, this proposal was unenthusiastically received by teachers. Representatives of the government also asked teachers to relinquish all control over school calendars and hours worked:

A board may implement a school calendar that is inconsistent with the current terms in the collective agreement related to hours of work, work day and work year, provided the local is given written notification no later than forty (40) working days prior to its implementation. (BCPSEA, 2014a)

Under teachers’ previous contract, if administrators wanted to make changes to days worked – for e.g., moving from a one to a two week spring break – there was a contractually defined process, and it included consultation with teachers. The government’s proposal would have allowed administrators to arbitrarily re-arrange the calendar and hours worked without consultation with teachers.

As can be seen, government representatives pushed major concessions on teachers, and the tabling of these concessions impeded the possibility of a negotiated agreement. At the same time, the government’s push for concessions demonstrates that the priorities that underlay government’s proposals were less aimed at reaching a negotiated settlement than in a broad extension of managerial control over teachers and their work.

Bad Faith as ‘Good Faith’: How the BCLiberals’ Obstructed and Subverted the Possibility of a Negotiated Settlement

The BCLiberals inflamed and provoked, tabled dubious proposals, and obstructed the possibility of mediation as a path to a negotiated settlement. For instance, after teachers named a candidate to intervene as mediator, Premier Christy Clark expressed her enthusiasm by asserting that “no credible mediator” would take on this dispute. Unsurprisingly, a few hours later the candidate announced that he was ‘too busy’ and declined the role (Bailey, 2014).

The BCLiberals provoked teachers with a lockout and pay cut, scuttled the possibility of a mediated settlement, and categorically rejected the possibility of arbitration. The government reasoned that turning the dispute over to a third party would relinquish control over the province’s finances to an unelected third-party. However, it is worth noting that in *BCTF v. BC* (2014), BC’s Supreme Court ruled that “If an impasse was reached, a plethora of tools were available to resolve the impasse, including mediation or arbitration [emphasis added]” [¶142]. At a minimum, this means that the provincial government of BC may lack the legal grounds to deny teachers access to binding arbitration. Said differently: In rejecting teachers’ proposal to enter into binding arbitration, the BCLiberals made it apparent that their idea of ‘good faith’ bargaining may be different from that of BC’s Supreme Court.

Throughout this ordeal, the BCLiberals tried to divide and conquer with wedge tactics and dishonest spin. For instance, there was a repeated attempt to derail talks by invoking other unions’ collective agreements

which include ‘me-too’ clauses. Basically, government representatives argued that if teachers got increases it necessarily meant that other unions would get increases, and this would toss the provincial budget into the red. It is worth noting, however, that teachers never signed any contract with a ‘me-too’ clause, and that teachers got legislated into zeroes while many other unions enjoyed modest salary increases. More importantly, it is also worth noting that the BCLiberals announced a projected surplus of \$266 million for 2014 (Meiszner, 2014), and a contingency fund with a balance of \$2.9 billion – earmarked for Liquefied Natural Gas (read: ‘fracking’) and labour agreements (Sheppard, 2014). It follows, then, that the BCLiberals were less than honest in arguing that financing a contract with teachers was beyond the financial means of the province (MacDonald, 2014).

The BCLiberals also attempted to divide teachers and to fragment teachers’ collective advocacy. For example, BC’s Minister of Education, Peter Fassbender, suggested that the “BCTF leadership has stubbornly ... refused to give teachers a chance to vote on suspending the pickets” (BC Ministry of Education, 2014). However, BC’s teachers did vote on suspending the pickets: They voted overwhelmingly – 99.4% – in favour of suspending job action just as soon as the province agreed to enter into binding arbitration to resolve the bargaining impasse (Burgmann, 2014). The BCLiberals, as previously noted, were unwilling to enter into arbitration. As a result, Minister Fassbender might have been more honest if he had identified himself and the BCLiberals as “stubbornly” obstructing a negotiated settlement.

As shown above, for the BCLiberals negotiations with teachers included ‘pressure tactics’ that obstructed negotiations and subverted teachers’ advocacy. This suggests that the BCLiberals’ style of governance may be grounded in undemocratic expressions of power. Although the BCLiberals publicly emphasized a desire to reach a negotiated settlement with teachers (Judd, 2014), the recent round of negotiations provides numerous counter-examples that indicate that their priorities may have lain in subverting the possibility of a negotiated settlement with teachers.

Challenging Shock Therapy: BC’s Teachers Gesture Toward a More Equitable Otherwise

In rejecting the BCLiberals’ push for concessions and cuts, BC’s teachers took a principled stand in an attempt to secure more equitable access to learning supports in BC’s public schools. After backing an appeal for increased services for students with special needs all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada (Chapnick, 2012), BC’s teachers have drawn a line in the sand and said: ‘No mas!’ This act of resistance follows years of cuts to services that have left teachers – and students! – struggling with decaying supports.

Prior to having been [illegally] struck from teachers’ collective agreement [by the BCLiberals], class composition ratios provided baseline standards for resourcing supports in BC’s public schools. For instance, struck language included: a maximum of 20 students allowed a kindergarten class, a limit of 20 students in classes for English Language Learners (i.e., students whose first language is not English), and a cap of 24 students in tech classes. Classes specifically designated for students with special needs were capped at 15. As for ratios, struck language insured that schools had 1 school counselor for every 360 students, 1 teacher librarian for every 927 students, 1 learning assistance teacher for every 801 students, 1 special education resource teacher for every 232 students, and 1 teacher for every 65 English Language Learners.

After having struck these caps and ratios from teachers’ collective agreement, classroom composition issues in BC’s classrooms have become increasingly complex. These days, for example, the number of students per counsellor can be as high as 1,200 to 1 (Swiggum, 2011). More broadly, according to figures from BC’s Ministry of Education, there has been a steady increase in the number of classes with more than three students on Individualized Education Plans (Tables 1-2). BC’s teachers have watched students fall through the cracks as this increase in need has not translated into an increase in supports for students.

Table 1. Class composition in BC, 2006-2007 to 2012-2013 (Kuehn, 2013).

Number of classes with more than 3 IEP students	
Year	All grades (K-12)
2006-07	9,559
2007-08	10,313
2008-09	10,985
2009-10	11,959
2010-11	12,240
2011-12	12,651
2012-13	14,885

Table 2. Change in learning specialist teacher positions, 2001-2014 (White & Field, 2013).

FTE specialist teachers	2001-02	2007-08	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	Change 2001-02 to 2013-14	
						#	%
Library Services	921.8	730.0	635.8	646.6	627.5	-294.3	-31.9%
Counselling	989.6	915.8	870.1	871.1	858.3	-131.3	-13.3%
Special Education	4,051.5	3,446.5	3,282.3	3,381.3	3,236.8	-814.7	-20.1%
English Language Learning	1,015.6	788.7	673.7	686.2*	816.8	-198.8	-19.6%
Aboriginal Education	206.9	193.4	196.0	204.7	203.1	-3.8	-1.8%
Totals	7,185.4	6,074.4	5,657.9	5,789.9	5,742.5	-1,442.9	-20.1%

This provides a context for understanding why BC's teachers were willing to initiate job action in order to secure improvements to classroom composition.

Aside from seeking improvements in learning supports for kids in need, BC's teachers showed their values by making sacrifices for BC's schools. For instance, teachers proposed a salary increase that is below the rate of inflation (BC Stats, 2014).¹ And teachers were on the picket lines for months without any strike pay – sacrificing months of salary to secure more equitable resourcing for BC's public schools. These are not the actions or values of greedy, self-interested individuals, but of a passionate, conscientious collective that is guided by a vision of meeting students' needs and nurturing a common good.

Opposing and Subverting the Shock Doctrine in BC

Klein (2007) insists that the successful implementation of shock doctrines relies on exploiting gaps in understanding to advance the application of market “solutions”. That is, shock doctrines rely on “confusion, disorientation and surprise. Without those elements, there is no shock” (p. 552). This means that “once the mechanics of the shock doctrine are deeply and collectively understood, whole communities become harder to take by surprise, more difficult to confuse – shock resistant” (p. 552).

In BC, the BCLiberals manufactured a bargaining impasse with teachers that could have provided a space for the shock doctrine to take root. The fast moving events and confusion that flowed from the bargaining impasse with teachers could have been used as justification for deeper cuts and more privatization. Instead, broad public support for teachers and public education acted as an impediment to the BCLiberals' agenda, and can offer inspirational ideas for other times and places where there is a struggle to challenge “orchestrated raids on the public sphere” (Klein, 2007, p. 26).

¹ BC's teachers have received salary increases of 0% in 6 of the last 14 years, for an average increase of less than 1% per year for 16 years. And in 1996 BC's teachers traded salary increases for language in their collective agreement that provided improvements to classroom supports. These are the very same assurances that the BC Supreme Court ruled were illegally struck from teachers' contract (BCTF v. BC, 2011).

BC's Teachers Galvanize a Popular Resistance

For teachers in BC, the key to successfully negotiating a collective agreement while subverting the shock doctrine was kindling a broad front of popular resistance and support. This involved a coalition of advocates – teachers, parents, students, politicians, and conscientious citizens – acting individually and in concert to educate themselves and others about the circumstances that drove teachers' advocacy. Some examples of this work include chats among concerned citizens, letters written to newspapers, and call-ins to radio programs. More formal examples of subverting the “confusion, disorientation and surprise” that are intrinsic to shock therapy included strategic public outreach (<https://twitter.com/bctf/status/501137319559462912>), media campaigns (<http://bcfed.ca/bc-unions-oppose-attack-on-bargaining-rights/>), rallies in support of public education (BCTeacherInfo, 2014), and town hall-style discussions that focused on teachers' concerns (CKNW, 2014).

One of the most powerful vehicles for challenging the shock doctrine's grasp on the bargaining impasse between teachers and the BCLiberals was social media. Teachers and friends of public education aggressively used social media to share their stories – and concerns. One potent example of this advocacy was the hashtag #ThisIsMyStrikePay, which out-trended #WorldCup2014 for a time, and was used to offer a powerful counter-narrative to the assumption that teachers' resolve would be shaken if their strike fund had run dry (Ling, 2014). However, a significant amount of networking and organizing was also conducted through FaceBook. For instance, concerned citizens organized and launched a recall of elected officials – i.e., attempted to remove politicians from office. FaceBook was also used to organize a boycott of businesses who supported the BCLiberals' appeal of BCTF v. BC (2014), to highlight businesses that supported BC's teachers, and to build an array of parent-teacher alliances. The impacts of these informal networks may be difficult to trace, but it is clear that social media played a major role in building support for teachers.

Notwithstanding, a wide array of stakeholders was needed to overcome a government bent on punishing teachers with vicious concessions. As previously mentioned, Bakan (2014) asserted that the BCTF acted “sensibly and reasonably” in calling for binding arbitration and for rejecting the BCLiberals' ‘get out of jail free’ clause. Raffi Cavoukian, an anti-bullying advocate and children's entertainer, took a strong line against the BCLiberals' ‘bullying’ of BC's teachers. Sandy Garossino (2014), a former Crown prosecutor, publicly derided the BCLiberals for making “specious threats” and insisted that “a serious attempt to compromise [with teachers] would yield a fiscal result that could readily be accommodated without dinging the taxpayer.” Wayne Ross (2014), a professor of curriculum and pedagogy at UBC, reasoned that teachers were serious about getting back into schools, but the BCLiberals were “intractable in their devotion to an ideology that is ... devoted to maximizing private profits rather than serving public needs.” John Horgan (2014), leader of the opposition party in BC, publicly challenged the BCLiberals for inflaming the situation and showing disrespect to teachers. Around the same time, Rob Fleming – the opposition party's education critic – took issue with the Ministry of Education's obstructive tactics and publicly called for the resignation of BC's Minister of Education (Austin & Luba, 2014).

Teachers' advocacy was also complemented by local and international pressure. Parents, for example, protested the government's handling of the bargaining impasse by bringing their children to confront local government officials with organized “playdates” (Ackermann, 2014). And officials from the Chinese Consulate – acting in the interests of parents paying steep international fees – intervened and expressed concern over the delayed start to the school year (Sherlock, Chiang & Shaw, 2014).

This pressure played a role in pushing the government into removing concessions from the table, but teachers needed more than supportive words from allies. After weeks on the picket lines without pay, teachers faced real financial pressures, but were able to sustain their advocacy due to a massive outpouring of financial support. Vancity, a Vancouver-based financial co-operative, offered a Strike Relief Plan that included loan consolidation, loan/mortgage payment deferral, and credit extensions of up to \$25,000 for teachers and parents who faced financial hardships during the strike (Vancity, 2014). For their part, small

businesses donated proceeds to teachers, and community advocates created a website to allow others to pledge financial support for teachers (Woo, 2014).

Another key axis of teachers' successful resistance was solidarity from other unions. Teachers unions and workers' organizations from around the world wrote letters in support of BC's teachers (BCTF, 2014c). Education International, a global federation of teachers' unions, organized a conference in Montreal where more than 60 countries voiced support for the BCTF (CTF, 2014). Hassan Yussuff, the president of the Canadian Labour Congress, spoke on behalf of teachers, visited teachers' picket lines, and worked behind the scenes to push the BCLiberals to compromise (Hunter, 2014). Ontario's teachers supported BC's teachers with \$1.5 million (CBC News, 2014), then added another \$100,000 (Hager, 2014). Teachers in Nova Scotia added \$50,000 (<https://twitter.com/NSTeachersUnion/status/513047885676838913>), and BC's nurses added another \$500,000 (BCNU, 2014). Overall, the labour movement in BC pledged more than \$8 million in interest-free loans to support teachers' advocacy (Ball, 2014).

Teachers' struggle to achieve a negotiated collective agreement was not a solitary quest, but was supported by local and non-local community groups, political pundits and legal experts, parent advocates and education scholars, labour unions and small businesses. This support translated into pressure at the bargaining table, and led to the possibility of a negotiated collective agreement.

BC's Teachers Negotiate a Victory ... and the Struggle Continues

After more than a year and a half of negotiations and six months of job action, an agreement was negotiated and ratified by a strong majority of BC's teachers.² On balance, this collective agreement represents a major victory for teachers as it includes some targeted improvements and lacks major concessions. However, it is possible that the most salient outcomes of teachers' job action may not be included within the actual wording of the collective agreement. In standing up to the challenge of negotiating with the BCLiberals, BC's teachers provided a model for advocates of public education to cultivate shock resistant advocacy and contributed to increased levels of public engagement, awareness of teachers' concerns, and support for public services in BC.

The contract ratified by teachers includes a 7.25% salary increase over six years. It also includes a \$105 million pay-out as remedy for retroactive grievances stemming from BCTF v. BC (2011), and \$75-85 million per year to address composition issues in BC's classrooms. The contract also includes modest improvements for elementary teachers' prep time and major improvements for on-call teachers: a more equitable rate of pay and the accrual of seniority for each day worked.

Admittedly, the contract ratified by teachers will not (re)solve the problems that plague BC's schools. As a % of GDP, BC's investment in public education remains among the worst in Canada (BCTF, 2012). And after years of zeroes, a 7.25% salary increase does not keep pace with inflation and insures that BC's teachers will remain among the worst paid in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2013a). It is also worth noting that BC's school boards reported a budget shortfall of \$130 million for 2013 (CBC News, 2013), so it seems fairly certain that \$75-85 million per year will be insufficient remedy for addressing composition issues in BC's classrooms. In addition, a meagre \$105 million for teachers' retroactive grievances may be a bargain for the government, but it leaves teachers to confront the sad reality that government would rather pay a small penalty and fight in court to preserve cuts to public services than fund services.

All things considered, however, the contract may be most notable for what it does *not* include: concessions. That is, teachers negotiated for and signed a collective agreement without a 'loser wins' or 'get out of jail free' clause, without draconian revisions to provisions for teacher evaluations, and without agreeing to relinquish teachers' influence over school calendars or hours worked. In an era of austerity budgets and harsh cuts to public services, it is no small feat for a public sector union to resolve a full-scale

² Overall, 31,741 teachers – of about 41,000 – voted. 27,275 voted in favour of ratification, which means that about 86% of the teachers who cast a ballot voted 'yes' (O'Connor, 2014).

strike with a negotiated contract without concessions. After rallying around the push for a fair deal for teachers and better supports for kids, advocates for public education in BC must now take on the difficult work of carrying forward this momentum so that schools are more equitably resourced and capable of meeting all kids' needs. First and foremost, advocates must push for a shift in priorities to improve the funding of public education as a % of GDP (Figure 1).

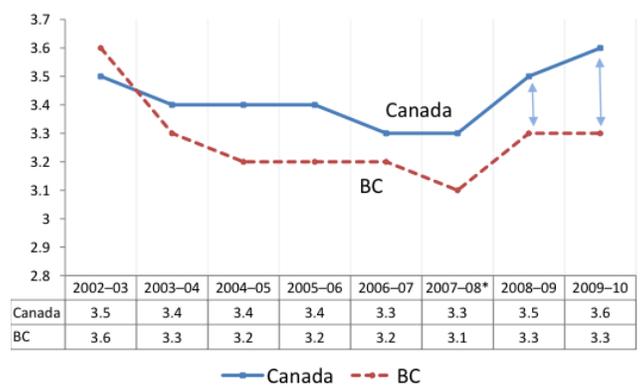


Figure 1. Total expenditures in public schools as percentage of GDP, Canada and BC, 2002-2010 (BCTF, 2012, p. 13).

At the same time, steps must be taken to address and improve BC's student-to-educator ratio and per-student funding (Figures 2-4).

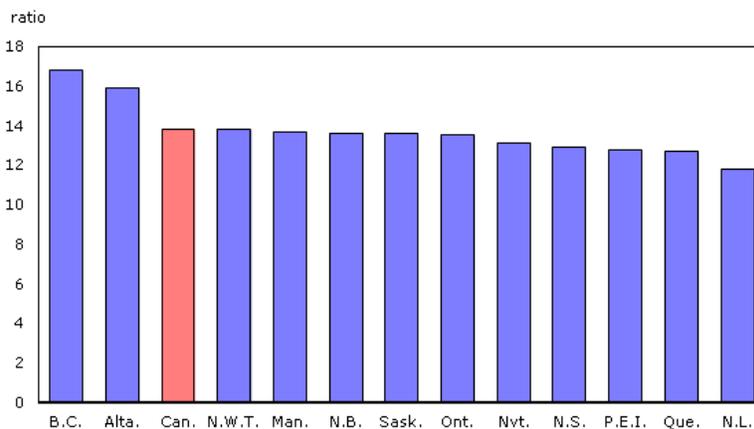


Figure 2. Student-educator ratio in Canadian public schools, 2010-2011 (Statistics Canada, 2013c).

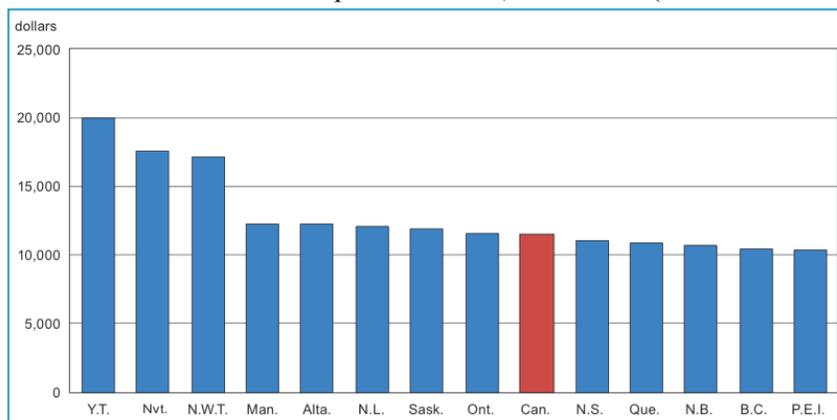


Figure 3. Operating expenditures per student in Canadian public schools, 2010/2011 (Statistics Canada, 2013).

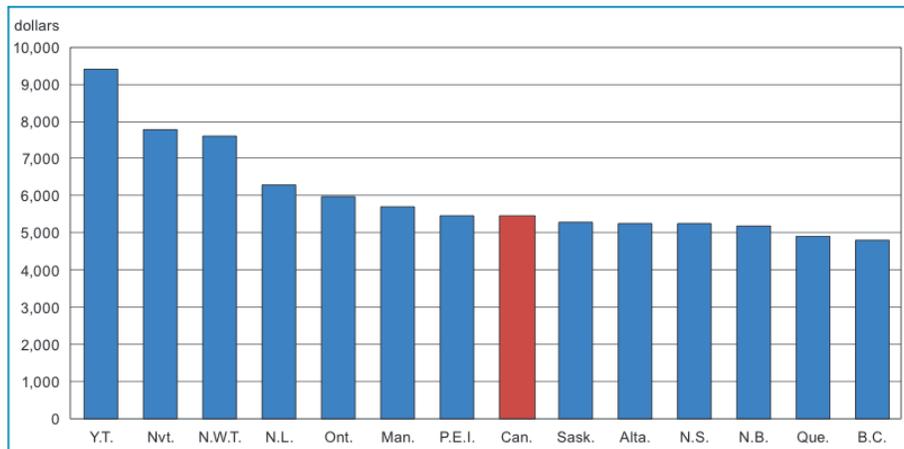


Figure 4. Educator remuneration per student in Canadian public schools, 2010-2011 (Statistics Canada, 2013a).

Another point of concern is that BC's teachers will continue to be tasked with providing meaningful learning opportunities for students with preparation time and pay that is among the worst in Canada (Table 3). This suggests that BC's teachers, students, and parents will continue to struggle to make by with diminishing access to resourcing for public education (Beresford & Fussell, 2009). It also indicates that many teachers are likely to continue to believe that they have inadequate time for one-on-one engagements with students and insufficient time to organize for their classes. Until these concerns are meaningfully resolved, teachers in BC will have reason to feel that the government of BC under-values their work. However, the collective agreement BC's teachers have ratified is a step forward, and will provide footing for sustained ongoing advocacy on behalf of public education in the province.

Table 3. Teacher prep time across Canada (BCTF, 2011).

	BC	Alberta (Calgary)	Saskatchewan (whole province)	Manitoba (Winnipeg)	Ontario (Ottawa)
Elementary	90 mins./week	370 mins./week	217 mins./week	180 mins./week	220 mins./week
Secondary	193 mins./week	370 mins./week	247.5 mins./week	240 mins./6 days	375 mins./6 days

Taken in sum, it should be apparent that the signing of a new collective agreement for BC's teachers does not signal the end of the struggle over the values that guide policy choices in the province. However, the tactics used to kindle broad popular support for teachers during the bargaining impasse with the BCLiberals can be extended and adapted to other contexts to challenge the advancement of private over public values, and cultivate shock resistant support for policies that affirm a more equitable otherwise for all.

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