

OCCUPATIONAL DIVISIONS AND STRUGGLES FOR UNITY AMONG BRITISH COLUMBIA'S PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS

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TUCKED INTO A FOLDER in the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) archives in Vancouver is a largely forgotten document from a half century ago. The certificate of affiliation between the BCTF and the Trades and Labour Congress symbolizes many important features of teaching. Public school teachers, since the 1940s, have made tremendous strides in their quest for professional respectability, yet they are no strangers to the public debates and political controversies many of them frequently and diligently have sought to avoid. To an occupation preoccupied with meeting the substantial and changing demands posed by contemporary education systems, the document seems to have little lasting significance. However, it also stands as a powerful reminder of the occupational challenges and struggles that lie at the core of public school teaching.

In the public's view, teachers' organizations like the BCTF often appear to speak for a homogeneous and unified group. A growing body of literature, however, attests to the differential work experiences, career paths, and occupational demands that give teaching its character. Teachers, like nurses, social workers, and other public sector workers, occupy a contradictory class location in that they perform wage labour in the interests of capitalist or bureaucratic control (Apple, 1986). Evidence from British Columbia and central Canada indicates, in addition, that teaching is segmented along other significant dimensions, including gender (Barman, 1990; Danylewycz, Light and Prentice, 1991) and rural and urban regional settings (Danylewycz and Prentice, 1986; Jones, 1979), as well as class and social background (Dunn, 1980; Warburton, 1986). While occupational solidarity and consensus periodically appear in the history of teachers' organizations, their presence must be constructed from elements in a teaching force that is not, by nature, cohesive. What gives rise to the differential occupational experiences and organizational responses of teachers?

I argue here that teaching is inherently contradictory as a work form oriented to the development and regulation of human subjects under changing social conditions. Its occupational character, highly regulated by the state, emerges through responsiveness to competing demands in socially-divided societies. Teaching is centrally concerned with attentiveness both to circumstances that affect the personal development of pupils and to transformations in terms and conditions of employment in schools and other workplaces.

The article illustrates the tensions that have shaped teaching through discussion of central events in the development of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation in the first four decades of the twentieth century. As public schooling in the province matured into a relatively stable, bureaucratically coordinated system during the period under consideration, teachers struggled both externally (with the provincial state and local school boards) and internally (among distinct segments of the teaching force) to find effective ways to define and pursue their occupational interests. The article details representative aspects of teaching divisions in the province, including contention over the formation and direction of the BCTF and differential working conditions experienced by male and female teachers in rural and urban schools. These are documented with reference to secondary accounts as well as publications and statements produced both individually and collectively by teachers.

THE FORMATION OF THE BRITISH COLUMBIA TEACHERS' FEDERATION

The collective organization of teachers in British Columbia had contradictory implications for teaching that both reflected and further contributed to the early segmentation of the province's teaching force. The province's highly centralized system of educational administration left teachers subject both to extensive formal regulations and to the paternalistic scrutiny of school inspectors and other senior education officials (Fleming, 1986; Johnson, 1964: 39). The emergent character of the teaching force in the late nineteenth century was divided, especially (but not exclusively) between teachers who were sufficiently privileged to share the experiences and ideals of education system officials and teachers who, because of difficult local circumstances and lack of qualifications, were not. University-educated male teachers who aspired to a career in educational management or other government work shared with more senior educational authorities an

interest in advancing teachers' status without undermining the existing school system hierarchy. However, for the vast majority of teachers, inadequate remuneration and poor teaching conditions provided a stark contrast to ideals of professional respectability. Miller (1913: 65), for example, reported that throughout western Canada in 1912, all but the most senior urban teachers "have not as yet from an economic point of view attained the rank of a skilled laborer." Insofar as the status and welfare of the entire occupation depended upon conditions experienced by the majority of teachers, all teachers had common cause for concern. Nonetheless, as the evidence outlined below emphasizes, the formation of a teachers' organization was to serve as a vehicle for both internal and external regulation of teaching as well as a base for teachers' collective resistance.

The earliest attempts to organize teachers were introduced by educational authorities, and later also by senior career-oriented teachers. Beginning in 1874, the provincial Superintendent of Education introduced a series of annual teachers' institutes to transmit to an assembly of the province's teachers advice on pedagogical practice and information about provincial regulations. While not formally permitted to discuss salaries and teaching conditions at the institutes, teachers on occasion did protest the government's increasing imposition of centralized control over the occupation (Warburton, 1986: 215-216; Wotherspoon, 1993). However, teachers' actions at institutes and conventions tended to be dominated by senior male teachers who did not experience the same kinds of teaching conditions as the majority of teachers, including women, urban classroom teachers, and teachers in smaller and single-room rural schools.

A national organization, the Dominion Educational Association (DEA), for instance, was formed in eastern Canada in 1891-92 as an initiative by senior teachers, along with provincial and local education administrators and officials from teacher training institutions, to align the total teaching force with their interests. The DEA, like provincial teachers' institutes, was dedicated to the discussion of educational matters for the advancement of education and the rational attainment of greater uniformity of educational practice (Stewart, 1957: 9-14). In 1909, for example, the association had responded favourably to a talk by the president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching on the foundation's efforts to promote a scientific basis for a secondary education system coordinated with the college system in Canada, the United States, and elsewhere (DEA, 1909: 80-89). Although the association strove to include the entire Canadian teach-

ing force in its ranks, the DEA was dominated by senior officials from provincial education systems. Alexander Robinson, who was the Superintendent of Education in British Columbia and president of the DEA in 1909, took pains to establish the benevolent nature of the organization, assuring the public that the DEA was not committed to the formation of a teachers' union (DEA, 1909: 7, 32). Frustrated with insufficient state support for education, tremendous regional discrepancies in education, and contentions that many teachers were employing outmoded pedagogical practices, the association's members sought to promote concepts of educational professionalism and growth that were free from overtly political motivations.

The "apolitical" orientations of educational authorities, expressed in groups like the DEA, clashed with the desires of many teachers for a vehicle through which teachers could act on such pressing concerns as teacher welfare and conditions of work. Tensions expressed between temperate calls for professional respectability and demands for action to address more immediate teacher grievances emerged as a recurring theme in teacher-state relations in British Columbia and elsewhere. Periodically in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, teachers attempted to meet in order to discuss and act upon common problems. As early as 1885, teachers in Victoria formed a local association, and teachers in the New Westminster and Kootenay districts organized their own teachers' institutes in the 1880s and 1890s.

However, the formation of more enduring educational and teachers' organizations was delayed by disagreement between proponents of teacher-led and administrator-led proposals. At the provincial teachers' institute in 1900, delegates heard and discussed a paper on the National Union of Teachers in Britain, and at the 1904 institute, delegates defeated a motion seeking the unity of British Columbia teachers for common benefit. Teachers sought on occasion to exclude superintendents and inspectors from the institutes, but they also felt obliged to explain the reasons for such exclusion to the school authorities (Bruneau 1978: 1-4; Heywood, n.d.: 10-12; British Columbia Public Schools Report — hereafter PSR — 1900: 251). Tensions were further revealed when school inspector David Wilson blamed teachers' conservatism for the defeat, at the 1908 provincial teachers' institute in British Columbia, of a resolution to establish as a counterpart to the DEA an educational association which would bring together in one organization all participants in the province's education system (PSR, 1908: B23-24). Danylewycz and Prentice (1986: 78) observe similar patterns in Ontario and Quebec, where teachers sought collec-

tive organization to improve wages and working conditions but, unlike teachers who developed working class ties in more highly industrialized urban centres in the United States and Britain, remained indecisive over enduring labour or professional linkages.

The eventual formation of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation in 1917 arose out of a compromise between proponents of contending visions of respectable (apolitical) teacher professionalism and active promotion of improvement of teacher welfare. While formed on teachers' initiative as an organization to advance teachers' interests, the federation was dominated from its inception by senior male career teachers. The organization gained early legitimacy from provincial education authorities but had to struggle more decisively for recognition from local school trustees and business interests.

In 1916, J. Lister, principal of the Vancouver Technical School and an active member of the Vancouver Teachers' Association, invited interested teachers from Victoria and the Lower Mainland to meet jointly to plan a common organization of active teachers. Delegates at a meeting in 1916 and at a founding organizational meeting early the next year agreed that teachers should organize in order to gain greater influence on educational matters. As Harry Charlesworth of Victoria emphasized, teachers had become too highly subject to the "fatherly" interest of provincial education officials (Bruneau, 1978: 4; Heywood, n.d.).

Collective organization was difficult given the segmented nature of the provincial teaching force. In 1915-16 there were employed in the province 2,064 teachers — three-quarters of whom were women — distributed across four school categories: high schools (8 per cent), city graded schools (41 per cent), rural municipal schools (24 per cent), and rural and assisted schools (27 per cent) (PSR, 1916: A7, A20).¹ Reflecting in part the different teaching conditions that concerned them, the teachers were divided on what type of organization to develop. One group favoured unionism in order to advance the welfare of the teaching profession; another stressed that because designation as a union would arouse public suspicion, a professional association would be more appropriate for teachers.

¹ Following an amendment to the *Public Schools Act* in 1906, the province's schools were organized according to four main categories: high schools, normally encompassing grades 9 to 12; graded city schools in urban municipalities, in which each school had at least two divisions with a principal and at least one assistant on the teaching staff; rural municipal schools, consisting of schools in organized rural municipalities that had at least two divisions; and rural and assisted schools, consisting normally of one-room schools in areas that were not organized as municipalities and, in the case of the latter, rural schools whose operating costs were paid entirely by the province (King, 1935: 10-12; Putman and Weir, 1925: 17).

In order to seek some common cause, although still reflecting domination by more senior experienced male teachers, delegates to the meeting in January 1917 adopted the name the British Columbia Teachers' Federation, which avoided direct reference to either a union or a profession, and set two principal objectives for their new organization — a professional concern to improve public education in general, and a commitment to seek common cause to increase the welfare and status of the teaching profession. J. Lister of Vancouver, who had initiated the 1916 meeting, was the organization's first president. Charlesworth became a federation vice-president until 1920, when he was appointed the federation's first full-time general secretary after the BCTF was incorporated under the provincial *Benevolent Societies Act* in 1919. Most of the early members of the federation were men from Victoria and the Lower Mainland who associated with one another and had common career ambitions within the education system. In a pattern typical of early teachers' organizations and institutes, all of the first BCTF officers, with the exception of the corresponding secretary, were men (Bruneau, 1978: 4, 7; Heywood, n.d.: 15-17; Johnson, 1964: 239-240).

The formation of the BCTF appeared to signify a new maturity for British Columbia teachers, consistent with a pattern across Canada where other provincial teachers' organizations were formed at the end of World War I (Muir, 1968: 28-29). As men returned from the war, they wanted to ensure that employment in teaching and other occupations was secure and it did not lose status and suffer other ill effects from the entry of women into the workforce during the war years. They also sought to provide for the occupation a share of the prosperity that had been fuelled by the wartime economy, and were prepared to defend this collectively, if necessary.

Although BCTF leaders actively promoted a notion of teaching as a non-militant body of trained professionals, they also recognized that teachers' lack of formal bargaining rights, combined with a propensity shared widely by school trustees and municipal councils to withhold public educational funds and subject teachers to arbitrarily designated duties, had aroused a growing militancy among teachers (BCTF, 1921a: 15).

Several local disputes shortly after the formation of the BCTF provoked an early test of the orientations and effectiveness of the teachers' organization. In 1919, the Victoria Teachers' Association engaged in a two-day strike, supported by nearly all of the teachers in the district, over the failure of the Victoria School Board to address

salary grievances. In February 1921, 97 per cent of the teachers in New Westminster participated in a one-week strike after the local board refused to recognize either the New Westminster Teachers' Association or its salary demands. The New Westminster School Board threatened that it would consider teachers' absence from work as indication of intent to resign, and advertised for applicants to fill the vacant teaching positions. Also in 1921, teachers in Saanich threatened to take strike action until the board agreed it would relent in its refusal to settle through arbitration a dispute over teachers' salaries (BCTF, 1921a; BCTF, 1921c; Bruneau, 1978: 8-9).

Despite these actions, the early position of the BCTF was ambiguous. Perhaps in part because the existence of the federation offered teachers a collective public presence, resolution of the Victoria and New Westminster strikes tended to favour the teachers. The Victoria situation led to an amendment to the *Public Schools Act* which provided for the first time the possibility of arbitration in teacher salary disputes. In 1921, with public support mounting in the teachers' favour, the New Westminster board met with the teachers' association before it agreed to take the matter to an arbitration board composed of board, teacher, and government appointees. However, resolution of the New Westminster dispute also required the mediating efforts of prominent local business and community leaders, including A. Wells Gray, Rev. Sanford, and J. G. Robson. The teachers' cause was aided by the late 1921 electoral defeat of school board members who were unsympathetic to the teachers, including the board chairman who considered the teachers as pawns acting in accordance with the interests of "bolshevist members" of the teachers' association (BCTF, 1921a; BCTF, 1921c; BCTF, 1922a). Moreover, in the absence of adequate funding by the municipality and the unwillingness of board members to arouse further hostility by collecting additional funds from ratepayers, the New Westminster teachers finally accepted an award package of \$5,000 rather than the arbitrated sum of \$11,000 (BCTF, 1922b).

Because the BCTF was a loose federation of local associations, it played no active role in the disputes, although Charlesworth advised local teachers and sat as the teachers' representative on the arbitration board in the New Westminster case. The Victoria and New Westminster strikes were fought as local matters. BCTF leaders, sensitive to public criticism over a possible militant image which would detract from professional goals, tended to pursue strategies of conflict avoidance that left many teachers' occupational grievances unattended to in

the face of recalcitrant school boards. Teachers in other districts, particularly in Vancouver and the Lower Mainland region, did not engage in collective action despite defeats of school money by-laws, inadequate salaries, and seriously overcrowded classrooms that often were used by two classes each day and held in temporary quarters (PSR, 1919: A37; PSR, 1920: C29; PSR, 1922: C46). In Merritt, for example, teachers agreed to teach larger classes in exchange for a 10 per cent increase in salaries that were generally inadequate to begin with, in order to save the cost of hiring one or more additional teachers; however, the municipal council rejected the salary increases, leaving the teachers few options except to call for establishment of a board of reference which could resolve contract disputes (BCTF, 1921A).

The prospects for teacher solidarity tended to be uncertain in any given situation. Because of variance in local situations from year to year, total membership in the teachers' federation fell from 53.6 per cent of the provincial teaching force in 1921-22 to 45 per cent in 1927-28 (calculated from Province of British Columbia, *Public Schools Reports*, 1921-1928, and MacLaurin, 1936: 329). Membership was concentrated in urban areas, and the most active BCTF members and leaders were male city high school teachers and school administrators. High teacher attrition rates, voluntary membership, and demands made by many boards on teachers' time and energy made wider organization of teachers in the province difficult. As the 1922-23 school year proceeded, for example, 579 of 1,606 BCTF members from the previous year had not renewed their memberships in the federation (Charlesworth, 1923).

The collective organization of teachers did not constitute a significant shift in the governance of teachers. The BCTF was dominated by a core of highly certified and experienced male teachers who shared common interests with men of similar backgrounds who were now employed by the provincial government as school inspectors, teacher educators, and other officials in the Department of Education. The orientations of the BCTF leaders followed the spirit of notions of subordinate partnership promoted by education superintendent John Jessop in the 1870s (Wotherspoon, 1993). Within the more hierarchically organized and formally developed school system of the 1920s, the aims of prominent teachers created a potential democratization of the school system, since collective organization allowed the possibility that all teachers might be able to gain a share of influence in the education system. Nonetheless, BCTF leaders and state school officials shared a vision of education which promoted, to the neglect

or subordination of teachers with inferior qualifications or experience, an ideal notion of the teacher as a skilled, male professional engaged in the socially important task of moulding young lives. BCTF general secretary and founding member Harry Charlesworth promoted the federation in 1927 as a "professional fraternity" — despite the fact that three-quarters of the teachers in the province were women! (Charlesworth, 1927; PSR, 1928).

Other than membership drives, most of the early BCTF activities and articles in *The B.C. Teacher*, the federation's publication, were oriented to appeals to raise the "professional spirit" of teaching through increased qualifications, training, and high character, reminiscent of similar appeals by educational administrators (see, e.g., Black, 1924; Charlesworth, 1924). BCTF officials established *The B.C. Teacher* in 1921 with the intent to disperse information about the organization's activities among the membership and serve as a "missionary enterprise" to enlighten the province's adult population about the virtues of public schooling. The BCTF's proselytizing zeal concerning the higher purposes of literacy and formal education was reflected in the composition of the federation magazine's first editorial board, which included the dean of arts and sciences and the head of the literature department at the University of British Columbia, the Victoria city librarian, and the principal of a Vancouver high school, as well as the BCTF's president and general secretary (BCTF, 1921b). Charlesworth proudly observed in 1926 that the federation had over the course of a decade made gains for teachers in the areas of international connections with other teachers' bodies, consultation with trustees and the Department of Education on disputes, legislation and changes in curriculum and school law, and some action to redress grievances over salaries and benefits (Charlesworth, 1926).

While the federation's benefits to teachers cannot be denied, there was little in all of this to address the day-to-day concerns of most of the teachers in the province's school system. To a large extent, the BCTF became a new level of paternalistic authority which sought to regulate teachers in the interests of professional development and formalize educational relations to provide for the efficiency of the school system.

DIVISION IN THE TEACHING FORCE AND PROBLEMS OF COLLECTIVE RESISTANCE

Two competing images of teaching prevailed from the 1920s through the 1940s. One, promoted by educational officials, administrators, and

teacher leaders who subscribed to the emergent philosophy of educational progressivism, portrayed teaching as a scientifically trained profession centrally involved in the apolitical endeavour of preparing individuals for life in a changing corporate order. The other, loosely shared by classroom teachers, many school trustees, and school officials dedicated to existing educational hierarchies, emphasized that teaching should be more responsive to daily community concerns than to service for a distant state. As a consequence of conflicting interests among teachers, state officials, and local trustees, neither view was entirely cohesive. These divisions — among teachers, and between teachers and other groups — produced variations in the ways in which teachers were regulated and the forms of resistance which teachers engaged in. Conflict, as the remainder of the article will show, was resolved by integrating teachers more fully into formal relationships within the state, although not entirely in accordance with the rational model advanced by educational progressivism.

A regular pattern of collusion between BCTF leaders and Department of Education officials, promoted by the establishment of a career line in which education department appointments tended to be drawn from the ranks of leading teachers, produced several problems for teachers. Although clearly it was useful for teachers to ally themselves with the Department of Education on such matters as seeking resources and public support for education, the department was not always committed to or successful in acquiring what the teachers wanted.

Pensions and salaries proved to be most troublesome in this regard. The settlement of salary matters, normally an issue to be resolved between teachers and school trustees, became a provincial concern as organized teachers began to pursue more vehemently demands which school boards often refused to acknowledge. Teachers in Vancouver gained a salary scale in 1929, and were followed over the next decade by teachers in other urban centres and some of the wealthier rural districts (Smith, 1960: 151). In 1938, teachers learned at the federation's annual general meeting that, despite inadequate provision for many already retired teachers, their pension fund was nearly bankrupt. Disgruntled teachers, led by Hugh Creelman of Esquimalt, forced the BCTF leadership to negotiate with the government a revised pension plan which took effect in 1941. Nonetheless, changes in the cost of living and periodic moves by government to reduce its share of contributions made the pensions issue a recurrent problem (BCTF, 1938b: 442; Evans, 1948; Smith, 1970).

During the Depression, school boards frequently reverted, often with the compliance of teachers who felt that they had to share the burden of economic crisis, to the argument of inability to pay so as to justify unilateral imposition of low salaries or wage cutbacks. In 1932, a provincially appointed salary commission, modelled after the Burnham committees on public sector wages in Britain, brought together representatives from the teachers' organization, government, trustees, and municipalities to make recommendations on a standardized teacher salary schedule. The committee became divided on the issue of what form the scales would take, and two separate reports were issued by a "teachers' panel" and a "people's panel." The teacher representatives, acting with assistance from the National Union of Teachers, Britain's largest teacher organization, refused to agree to proposals by the other committee members for a uniform province-wide scale set under depressed wage conditions. The teachers argued that a uniform provincial scale would lead to a lowering of maximum salary levels without a corresponding increase in minimum levels. Teachers were most anxious to entrench salary recognition based upon several criteria, including years of service, existing scales, educational background, level of teaching assignment, supervisory responsibilities, and gender. The government, aware of dissension on the committees and concerned about electoral support, did not act to set provincial scales, but it imposed minimum salary levels in 1932 in order to prevent total chaos in teacher salary settlement procedures. However, teachers' fears were soon realized when boards began to apply these minima as standard or even maximum salary levels (BCTF, 1932; Charlesworth, 1932; Johnson, 1964: 243).

Responding to these conditions, teachers appealed to school boards and the government for establishment of a settlement mechanism that would be binding on both parties in order to ensure that salary agreements would be negotiated and adhered to. Education minister G. M. Weir complied in 1937 by sponsoring an amendment to the *Public Schools Act* which provided for compulsory arbitration in teacher salary disputes. This measure was a victory for teachers in that the total salary agreement process was strengthened, but teachers did not receive explicit recognition of their right to bargain collectively until 1958 (Muir, 1968: 106). In the interim, arbitration would become a divisive issue for teachers, since rural teachers, more than teachers in the cities, faced local authorities who were reluctant to agree to or honour formal teachers' contractual demands or procedures.

The BCTF's strategy of cooperation with the Department of Educa-

tion reinforced a significant division of interests within the teaching force. Inequalities associated with rural-urban and gender distinctions, in particular, were exacerbated by tendencies for men to teach in larger centres and high school settings and for women to be concentrated in rural areas and elementary schools. In 1934, for example, 55 per cent of the province's 1,283 male teachers compared to 83 per cent of the 2,590 female teachers in the province taught in rural districts. Median salary levels for men were \$1,143 in rural districts and \$1,776 in urban districts, while for women the comparable levels were \$1,020 in rural districts and \$1,358 in urban districts (Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1934). In 1938, over a third of the province's female teachers, compared to one-fifth of the male teachers, received annual salaries of less than one thousand dollars (Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1938).

While these figures reflect such characteristics as differences in qualifications, teaching experience, and supervisory responsibilities, they point nonetheless to significant structural differences in the positions of men and women in the teaching force. The reorganization of schools in the wake of the 1925 Putman-Weir inquiry into the structure and operation of the province's education system extended the general division of labour which had previously characterized school organization. With larger schools and broader programme offerings, the number of school administrative positions (principals and vice-principals) expanded, providing new opportunities for the most well-situated qualified teachers. At the same time, the gradual disappearance of small, ungraded schools brought increasing proportions of teachers into direct subordinate roles in the school system under the supervision of in-school administrators. The prevalent ideology stated that women were predisposed to teach school, but only under appropriate male supervision. The observation of one school inspector in 1918, that the development of "manly men" required supervision by male teachers just as the development of "womanly women" required female supervision, gave way to the more general notion that classroom teaching "was a woman's job" (PSR, 1918: D28; Woodman, 1987: 1).

Under harsh economic conditions, women and rural teachers, and especially women teaching in rural settings, were most in need of action to redress immediate difficulties, while the organizational agenda for the long-term development of the occupation was being set by the predominantly male, city-based leadership of the BCTF. Teachers who were severely affected by these disparities were often further handicapped by geographical isolation and the harsh discipline

of local school boards (see Wilson and Stortz, 1988, for details). In rural areas, the strong paternalism of school trustees who preferred to dictate wages and conditions of employment provided a stark counterpoint to the emergent ideal of the skilled professional teacher employed in large schools organized around formal administrative principles. Nonetheless, even in larger districts and cities such as Vancouver, trustees and administrators were not hesitant to exercise personal regulation of teachers through such measures as producing unfavourable written reports, verbal condemnation, and restricted promotion opportunities for teachers who took an active role in advancing teachers' rights (Sutherland, 1987).

These factors made the idea of combining to take sustained action to improve teaching conditions and teacher welfare on a local and provincial level more appealing to a wide cross-section of teachers. By the mid-1930s, two-thirds of the province's teachers had become members of the BCTF (MacLaurin, 1936: 329; PSR, 1934). However, varying segments of the teaching force set distinct objectives for the teachers' organization which conflicted with the aims of longstanding BCTF leaders.

Senior teachers and school administrators continued their quest to organize teachers in order to protect the occupation as a whole and elevate teachers' professional status. BCTF leaders, frustrated in their dealings with local school trustees who were often uncompromising in their authority over teachers, and exhausted from lengthy annual drives to recruit new members into the federation, turned towards the possibility of gaining legislation that would make membership in the federation automatic with appointment to a teaching position. Delegates at the 1934 annual general meeting unanimously approved a resolution to seek official recognition of the BCTF as a professional body of all provincial teachers. Charlesworth (1934) wrote in *The B.C. Teacher* that the resolution demonstrated that the BCTF was on its way to becoming a "real" professional organization. In 1935, B.C. teachers supported overwhelmingly — by a margin of 3,014 to 105 — the executive's proposal to draft a bill on compulsory membership to submit to the legislature. The resultant bill outlined plans for "The Teachers' Society of British Columbia," with membership required of all active certified teachers in the province and with disciplinary power to suspend the registration of any teacher guilty of "unprofessional conduct in any respect" (BCTF, 1936). In 1937, the draft bill was taken to a referendum of provincial teachers. Over 80 per cent of eligible teachers voted, supporting the bill by a margin of 2,507 to 787.

Nonetheless, because approval of the bill required the support of three-quarters of all eligible teachers, the proposed bill was defeated (BCTF, 1935a; BCTF, 1937; Charlesworth, 1934).

BCTF leaders continued their efforts to organize and gain disciplinary power over their occupation in a "professional" sense, resulting in the implementation of a code of ethics in 1942 and legislation to grant automatic membership in 1947. The federation's leadership, however, faced strong opposition to their tactics and some of their objectives from a vocal minority of teachers who sought greater teacher autonomy from state officials and formal channels of authority (Bruneau, 1978: 25; Sutherland, 1987).

THE PURSUIT OF A TEACHERS' ORGANIZATION RESPONSIVE TO LOCAL CONCERNS

In 1935, two groups of high school teachers, one urban and the other rural, began to organize in order to advance alternatives to the BCTF leaders' pursuit of a nominal professionalism which ignored significant practical difficulties faced by teachers.

In Vancouver, several secondary school teachers, mostly men with a trade union background, formed the Vancouver Secondary School Teachers' Association (vsSTA) in order to secure economic protection for teachers and gain a stronger role in teachers' affairs than the principal-dominated BCTF structure permitted. vsSTA members agreed with the general principle of establishing a self-regulating teaching profession, but they saw little difference between the paternalistic leadership of the BCTF and the top-down direction from government. Asking the government to provide a bill for compulsory membership, according to vsSTA leaders like John Sutherland, would merely perpetuate teachers' dependence on the state and, at most, elevate BCTF leaders to positions of individual prominence. The alternative promoted by the vsSTA was to build a strong organization from within the occupation in order to promote teachers' common interests with organized labour and community groups. Teachers were not alone in their work, and the experiences and support of other workers who faced harsh employment situations in economic crisis could aid the teachers' cause. While some Vancouver secondary teachers promoted a resolution to form an organization that would advance men's wages at the expense of women's, unity-minded vsSTA leaders prevailed with a vision to support all teachers as agents for social and economic change (Bruneau, 1978: 23-25; Sutherland, 1987).

Rural teachers also had strong grievances against both a provincial education system that offered them inadequate, deteriorating working and living conditions and a teachers' organization which appeared to have forsaken the rural classroom teachers. The Chilliwack Teachers' Association sponsored a resolution at the BCTF's 1933 annual general meeting seeking support for rural education in the form of Department of Education resources and a superintendent of rural high schools (BCTF, 1933: 13). The motion was referred to the federation's executive committee, which did little to alleviate rural teachers' concerns. Also at that time, rural teachers began to use *The B.C. Teacher* as a forum to share ideas and express major concerns. Among the common problems observed by rural teachers were inadequate teaching materials, geographical isolation, large class sizes, restricted hours during which classrooms were available for the conduct of teaching, teacher inexperience, inadequate salaries, poor housing conditions, frequent teacher turnover, and prejudice by non-teachers and city teachers against rural teachers (see, e.g., Wrinch, 1935: 33). School facilities in rural districts were typically meagre. At Pender Harbour, north of Vancouver, for example,

The school was held in what was a bunkhouse. It had been a logging bunkhouse. It was on logs that were rounded on the front end for skidding it along to where it was to be left. They put in a couple of wooden steps so that you could get into it easily. The stove was a tin air-tight stove. There wasn't a proper Yukon roof thing. There was just a piece of metal with a hole cut into it and when the wind blew the stove pipe rattled against the side. There was a cedar shake roof and one day it hailed and all the hail came in on the kids. The inside walls were just gray building paper. My blackboard was two squares of black oil cloth, like the old table cloth, only that was shiny and this was black so it was able to take chalk. [You ran into] the shape of the boards underneath as you wrote. There was just no backing on them at all. My teacher's desk was made out of an old packing case and for a while there was a bed in one corner of this bunkhouse. [In one family] the father had an out with the mother and so he was sleeping at the school. I don't know where he was eating. . . . finally the other trustees moved that out of there, especially when they heard the inspector was coming. . . . There were no books at all. (Woodman, 1987: 15)

Rural teachers also had to contend with strong community pressure, often formalized in school board relationships, as in one case reported in the Peace River district:

Conditions in this region have become particularly unfavourable for teachers. Often the teacher became the butt of strong censure or disapproval or persecution, not because of inefficiency, but because he or she did not board at the right abode, or rent the right dwelling, or take sides with the proper clique, or because some trustee, to keep in the good graces of the community, catered to the whims of those antagonistic to the teacher. In one case, where the members of a certain school board had split into two extremely bitter factions, a teacher was engaged by each faction to fill the one vacancy, so that, when the opening day of school arrived, there were two teachers present with opposing representatives of the school board. (MacRae, 1935: 13)

The growing frustration of rural teachers was given focus as a consequence of a questionnaire circulated in 1935 to rural high school teachers by J. M. Thomas, a teacher at Cobble Hill. Thomas, who had helped organize a Rural Teachers' Association in Saskatchewan, saw in the questionnaire results sufficient evidence of teacher dissatisfaction to establish a distinct organization of rural high school teachers. In 1935, a group of the rural teachers met at the federation's annual general meeting to discuss mutual concerns about domination by urban teachers over federation policy and the peculiar problems encountered by teachers in rural British Columbia. Recognizing common cause at the meeting, the group crystallized as the Rural High School Section of the provincial Secondary School Teachers' Association. In 1938, rural elementary teachers formed a similar organization and in 1940, finding little satisfactory response from the BCTF as a whole, the two groups merged, calling themselves the Rural Teachers' Association (RTA). The RTA dedicated itself to providing an effective, unified rural voice for federation activities, improving and equalizing salaries for all teachers in the province, and organizing a pool of teaching resources to stimulate pedagogical development in rural schools (BCTF, 1935b; Roald, 1970: 238, 244-246).

The RTA membership was small, consisting of about one hundred elementary and secondary teachers, mostly men, even though in the late 1930s over one-quarter of the province's 4,000 teachers taught in small rural school districts and nearly two-thirds of rural teachers were women. Compensating for the RTA's size, its members possessed or quickly developed strong organizational skills. Members communicated among themselves and with other rural teachers through *The B.C. Teacher* and regular mimeographed newsletters, often financed

somewhat mischievously with BCTF resources. As in the VSSTA, the association members' strengths in organizational ability were effective in articulating positions and mobilizing votes at local and provincial teachers' meetings. The RTA shared with the VSSTA a democratic and egalitarian vision with respect to the teachers' organization itself as well as to the treatment of teachers and students in the education system. Classroom teachers who saw few concrete results from the BCTF's quiet diplomacy with the provincial government worked strenuously to give the teachers' organization a more decisive, representative and militant character. In 1938 and 1939, respectively, teachers sympathetic to the two organizations elected J. M. Thomas of the RTA and John Sutherland of the VSSTA to terms as president of the BCTF. In 1939, under pressure from rural teachers and BCTF members who felt the organization provided few tangible benefits, the federation introduced programmes such as a salary indemnity fund to provide coverage for teachers who lost income due to illness or accident, and a benevolent fund to be used in emergencies encountered by teachers (BCTF, 1938b; PSR, 1938; Roald, 1970: 246-247; Woodman, 1987).

Despite their members' organizational skills and determination to gain a solid voice in educational matters, the RTA and VSSTA faced strong resistance from the traditional BCTF leaders. These leaders, mostly school administrators, and in particular city elementary school principals with authority over large numbers of teachers, had an organizational and disciplinary base which the VSSTA and RTA lacked. During a debate by Vancouver secondary school teachers on labour affiliation, for example, one junior high school principal, H. N. MacCorkindale (who later became superintendent of schools for Vancouver), attempted verbally to intimidate teachers who supported affiliation with labour in order to get them to identify themselves. Several members of the VSSTA publicly opposed the principal's stand, and began a successful move to expel principals from the VSSTA (Sutherland, 1987: 7). However, this defiant teacher stance was unsettling to many teachers. The federation's traditional approach of quiet consultation and deference to senior educational authorities was seductive to a teaching force that received a sympathetic hearing from some members of government, especially education minister G. M. Weir.

By contrast, Charlesworth and other BCTF officials appeared to RTA members to demonstrate greater loyalty to government than to the teachers. Christine McNab, secretary of the RTA, wrote in 1942 that "in reality we have an oligarchic dictatorship in control. . . . The BCTF is very undemocratic in the composition of the Consultative

Committee . . . the important executive group in the BCTF. In this group we have centralized control by selected teachers in Vancouver with little or no representation from the teachers in the rest of the province" (cited in Roald, 1970: 236-237).

BCTF officials and other urban teachers, for their part, criticized the RTA as a disruptive force in the federation. The BCTF leaders, who took the position that differential salary scales prompted teachers to upgrade their qualifications, argued that RTA demands for equitable salary levels would undermine standards for the occupation as a whole (Roald, 1970: 249). The RTA policy of open, flexible membership to anyone teaching under rural conditions or experiencing rural problems proved frustrating to BCTF leaders. Federation officials attempted to constrain the rural teachers' organization by imposing a strict, detailed definition of rural teaching and establishing formal procedures that would bring the RTA's structure in line with BCTF organization (Charlesworth, 1941; RTA, 1941). The BCTF also attempted to discipline RTA activists. At one point, Tom Alsbury, president of the BCTF in 1942-43, demanded a membership list which he could use to identify and reprimand members of what he called the "Red Teachers' Association":

[Tom Alsbury] wanted a copy of our [the RTA's] membership list.

"Well, we don't have a membership list as such. Any teacher that is teaching in rural conditions is a member. We consider them a member whether he pays dues or not."

"Well, who are they?" And he railed away about that he was really angry with us. He says, "Look, I'm going to have you — you people are going to be ruled out of the B.C. Teachers' Federation. We are going to expel you if you don't come up with a list."

And so Morris Thomas stood back and he just calmly told Tom the situation — "We don't feel we are getting a fair shake. We feel that Charlesworth is working only for the Vancouver teachers," and so on. Nothing really came of it. (Woodman, 1987: 7)

The BCTF leaders' hostility towards the RTA and the federation's failure to address the need for action on matters of significance to classroom teachers strengthened the resolve of RTA and VSSTA members to alter existing authority relationships in education. RTA members demonstrated their defiance in 1942, calling for the removal of Charlesworth as the BCTF general secretary. On the matters of pensions and salaries, RTA and VSSTA members engaged in protracted and often bitter confrontations with BCTF leaders to persuade the federa-

tion to renegotiate terms of agreements with the provincial government in order to gain terms which were more favourable for teachers in general (Roald, 1970: 252-257; Sutherland, 1987: 16-17).

The clash between the action orientation of the VSSA and RTA and the polite negotiating approach of the BCTF leaders carried into several interrelated areas of concern in the late 1930s and early 1940s — improvement and parity on salary terms, better teaching conditions in rural schools, strengthening of the teachers' organization, and cultivation of ties with labour organizations.

The RTA's position on salary arbitration highlighted the differences between the two approaches. The RTA opposed arbitration as partial and ineffective in nature, pitting isolated groups of teachers against trustees. Combination, through provincial salary scales, labour affiliation, and in other forms was a more effective expression of democracy than the BCTF leadership's emphasis on fragmented strategies which often, despite stated aims to the contrary, reflected self-interest. The RTA executive declared in 1942:

We reaffirm our loyalty to the cause of a democratic system of education in this province. We hold ourselves loyal to a cause that is greater than any individual's welfare or any particular type of organization. This is not to be confused with that type of loyalty that is the customary device of the social or political climber or of the office-holder or job-hunter. . . . We are not primarily loyal to that group centering around the person of the general secretary — a group "in the nature of an oligarchy" — whether or not the president is proud to rate himself a member of it. We prefer to hear no more rantings about loyalty from the present president of the B.C.T.F. (RTA Executive, 1942: 94, 103)

The strains which emerged to the forefront as teachers sought effective ways to pursue major issues came to be defined by many teachers and non-teachers as a matter of professionalism versus unionism, or moderates versus militants. There was no unanimity that the distinction was useful, but it was to become an enduring one.

THE RECOGNITION OF COMMON CAUSE AMONG TEACHERS AND THE STATE

Despite their internal struggles, teachers did find some common ground, particularly in salary negotiations with school boards. The

BCTF's organizational support was useful in providing advice and resources to counter authoritarian and paternalistic trustees. Not even the most anti-rural city BCTF officials could deny the problems rural teachers faced in their dealings with school boards. Trustees' propensity to dismiss teachers and their provincial federation was illustrated in a situation which occurred in Chilliwack, as described later by John Sutherland, who at the time of the event in 1937 was the BCTF's vice-president:

The school board would negotiate with the local teachers' association, but they were prepared to have me come out and meet them along with Charlesworth. But they wouldn't allow Charlesworth to come into the meeting because he was too much of an agitator. This was their contention and, of course, those of us who were against the compulsory membership looked upon Mr. Charlesworth as a very, very, very moderate man. In our view too moderate. And here the Chilliwack School Board looked upon him as a militant whom they refused to meet. So, it ended up with me every now and then having to pop outside to see Charlesworth to see what we thought of the latest proposition. Well, we ended up at this meeting with a maximum of \$1,800 for the secondary teachers and we shook hands on it. And that was, I think, a Friday night, and they told me they would formally adopt the agreement at their next board meeting which would be on Monday or Tuesday of the following week. This meeting with me couldn't do that because it wasn't a meeting that had been called according to the school law. And much to my surprise then on Wednesday of the next week, I think it was, I got a phone call telling me that they had reneged on the agreement. We had a gentlemen's agreement and they just went back on it. (Sutherland, 1987: 13)

The cooperative relationship between BCTF officials and local teachers was given a serious test in Langley in 1939, when the school board refused to name a committee member to adjudicate an arbitration case between the board and the Langley Teachers' Association. The government, following the procedure outlined by the 1937 amendment to the *Public Schools Act*, appointed a representative for the trustees, but the board then refused to accept the arbitration decision that was made. When the teachers, acting in consultation with BCTF president John Sutherland, successfully carried their case to court, the board made futile attempts first to fire, and then demote, forty teachers, all women who had been instrumental in the fight

against the board's actions. The teachers were reinstated when the provincial cabinet dismissed the school trustees and replaced them with a cabinet-appointed trustee as provided for by provincial school legislation (Bruneau, 1978: 28-30; Sutherland, 1987).

The Langley case highlighted the growing willingness of teachers to employ and extend the legal and organizational devices available to them. Teachers allied themselves with the state, at the provincial level, in their efforts to formalize and stabilize educational relations when the province appeared willing to use legislation or official procedures to grant teachers some security against recalcitrant school boards which often attempted to degrade the role of teachers, particularly women. The Langley situation demonstrated that teachers could overcome these obstacles if they were organized and able to mobilize their ranks for prolonged periods of time.

Overall, struggles in the 1930s and 1940s for direction within the teaching force revealed the contradictory nature of teaching. Teaching was constructed through a combination of factors, including state regulation, changing but frequently harsh material circumstances, segmentation within the teaching force, and ideologies of professional service grounded in both school practices and corporate requirements for social stability. No single logic of either professionalization or proletarianization prevailed, but, rather, the occupation was shaped by the efforts of contending interests to accommodate teaching as an educative and productive venture. However, there was growing agreement among teachers and state officials that the school system required greater internal consistency with more equitable treatment for all school participants. Divergent orientations towards teaching were most likely to converge under particular circumstances in which conditions tended either to require or threaten the stability of teaching within the education system as a whole, as the question of BCTF affiliation with organized labour was to demonstrate.

LABOUR AFFILIATION

The efforts of RTA members to attract attention to rural conditions, combined with dramatic experiences like the Langley case, drew some sympathy from city teachers, most of whom had begun their teaching careers under similar circumstances. At the BCTF's 1943 annual general meeting, members agreed to pursue a course of action in support of teachers' rights which included possible affiliation with organized labour and a campaign for improved rural teaching conditions. The

question of seeking closer ties with the union movement was brought to the forefront of the BCTF agenda by the VSSTA members, eventually by the RTA, and by individual teachers who saw striking parallels in the treatment received by teachers and by other employee groups during the Depression. The possibility of teachers' involvement with labour highlighted tensions over the dual nature of teaching. Proponents of unionism emphasized teachers' role as productive employees in common with other workers. Opponents argued that teaching, with its sensitive contribution to human development, needed to remain distinct from any class or political factions.

The debate over affiliation with labour became a continuing part of BCTF politics in the 1930s, highlighted especially at annual general meetings which brought together teachers from across the province. In 1938, a committee established by the federation to investigate the matter presented divided recommendations. Three members issued a majority report recommending affiliation with the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, while two members in a minority report opposed affiliation. The two reports expressed clearly the distinction between a view that teachers should promote working class interests and the corporate position that teachers should act in the general interest. The majority report, under the leadership of K. Madge Portsmouth, expressed a view of teachers as productive workers:

The interests of teachers, both as regards economic considerations and also as regards professional standards, are closely bound up with the interests of the workers, whose children form the great majority of our school population. Teachers are producers, in the sense that they add to the mental and material wealth of the community. (BCTF, 1938a: 313)

By contrast, the minority report, while not opposed to the principle of cooperation with labour, stressed that teachers should work for the common good of all society, avoiding any political action or class consciousness "that would tend to increase rather than diminish the social tensions and cleavages already existing" in society (BCTF, 1938a: 315).

These debates were replicated throughout the province in several instances. The latter view in opposition to affiliation emphasized the general argument of BCTF leaders that unionism was incompatible with a form of professional status or occupational self-governance that would enable teachers to act in the public interest. Links with trade unions, according to this view, would create partisan or organizational

obligations that would hinder the ability of teachers to attain automatic membership provisions for the BCTF, to deliver an important public service, and to achieve professional growth and pedagogical development. The former view, held by proponents of union affiliation like the vssta and militant RTA members, stressed to the contrary that ties with labour were not irreversible and were in fact compatible with teachers' professional aspirations. They defined the benefits of affiliation in terms of the increased ability that teachers would have to influence and learn from other sectors of society. While the most radical teachers stressed the need to develop working class ties, other proponents of union affiliation saw unionism as merely one of several links that could be cultivated with other groups, including government (Ovans, 1955). The legitimacy of teacher affiliation with labour was enhanced when even the Minister of Education, H. G. J. Perry, publicly indicated in 1943 that he saw no reason to oppose teachers' efforts to seek liaisons with other groups (*Vancouver Sun*, 1943).

At the federation's 1943 annual general meeting, fuelled by frustration over salaries and rural teaching conditions, 56 per cent of the delegates voted in favour of a resolution to affiliate formally with a labour organization. The Rural Teachers' Association declared at the meeting that its goals of committing teachers to act to recognize rural teaching concerns and seek ties with labour had been met, and agreed to disband. The BCTF committee on labour liaison was instructed to decide whether to affiliate with the trades-oriented Trades and Labour Congress or the Canadian Congress of Labour, which was composed primarily of industrial unions. With an assurance from the former that teachers would not be forced to go on strike to support any other union, the BCTF opted for affiliation with the Trades and Labour Congress, effective 20 December 1943 (BCTF, 1950: 269, 272). These ties were strengthened by decisions of Vancouver and New Westminster teachers' associations to join the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council.

Ironically, teachers' actions in 1943 transcended the inclination held by most teachers to avoid or step tentatively into labour politics. Teachers feared being enmeshed in a larger organization which might coerce them into supporting particular political orientations or strike action that seemed beneath the dignity of teachers. In fact, however, as Phillips (1967: 140) states, the move by the BCTF to affiliate with the Trades and Labour Congress actually influenced the labour movement in the province. Teachers' entry into the labour fold provided legitimacy for a burgeoning sector of white-collar workers and public

employees whose membership in craft unions would eventually outnumber the more traditional industrial union base after World War II.

The mood of aggravation that swayed B.C. teachers to support union affiliation also forced them to confront the strike question without being pushed by other groups. In September 1942 the RTA called for a provincewide "Education Day Protest" to publicize, through a one-day withdrawal of services, problems in education and the province's failure to address salary disparities for rural teachers (Roald, 1970: 255). That same autumn, teachers in North Vancouver mobilized and received a near-unanimous strike vote sufficient to convince a government-appointed trustee in the district to reconsider his refusal to concede arbitration or improvements in teachers' salary scale. The North Vancouver situation, with its amalgam of rural and urban teaching conditions, illustrated the barriers teachers faced in their struggle for improved wages and status. Eric Woodman, president of the North Vancouver Teachers' Association at the time, later recounted that:

I was principal of a four-room school in North Lonsdale and I think I was getting \$1,300 a year. One of my grade seven kids quit and went and worked in the shipyards, and he was getting more than I was. He said, "Come down and work for me." So that was the sort of thing. [The district trustee] said, "Gentlemen, if I were sitting on that side of the table, I'd be doing the same thing that you are; I'd be asking for an increase in wages. But I am sitting here and I've got to find the money and I can't do it." So that was it. (Woodman, 1987: 8-9)

The BCTF leadership, concerned about the possible impact of a teachers' strike on the public and on other disgruntled teachers, attempted to stifle publicity over the strike vote. Nonetheless, the North Vancouver Teachers' Association, in common with the RTA, saw the creation of public awareness of the teachers' plight as one of the objectives of strike action, and ignored the warnings of BCTF president Tom Alsbury to avoid comment to the media (Woodman, 1987: 9).

The position of the RTA, vsSTA, and North Vancouver teachers reflected a growing desire among teachers to break from the traditional quiet diplomacy that had brought them few positive results in recent years (Roald, 1970: 263). The range in average salaries for different categories of teachers, between \$980 for rural elementary school teachers and \$2,434 for city high school teachers in the 1942-43 school year, provided a focal point for rural teachers' concerns; 601

teachers of the province's 4,029 teachers had salaries below \$900 (PSR, 1943). As part of the RTA's action plan, which garnered support from the BCTF membership in 1943, the federation mounted a referendum on the question of teachers' support for strike action as the only means to draw the government's attention to conditions in rural schools. The RTA proposed a strike to begin on 15 October 1943, if all teachers were not assured a minimum salary of at least \$900 by that time. Referendum votes were cast by 2,908 of the province's 4,203 teachers, with 56.6 per cent of the ballots in favour of strike action. The results revealed a greater proclivity for militant action among rural teachers and non-members of the BCTF than among city teachers and federation members. Support for the measure ranged from 45.3 per cent in the cities to 74.4 per cent in rural districts, while 60.5 per cent of teachers who were not BCTF members, compared to 54.3 percent of federation members, voted in support of strike action (BCTF, 1944, 2-3). The strike vote, while high, was below the mandate required for job action to occur. Several factors, including statements of commitment from the federation leadership and the government to increase education grants and seek improvement in the organization of education, especially in the rural areas, the federation's impending labour affiliation, and inadequate mobilization among BCTF members to support a strike, eventually helped to moderate the strike threat.

The strike vote and other signs of teacher unrest, however, showed that classroom teachers were increasingly determined to alter the traditional relations of deferential co-operation with authorities both in and outside of the occupation. The conception of the teacher as a professional educator oriented to the eradication of social division and other evils was meaningful only to those teachers who held or could realistically attain favourable positions in the school system, usually as administrators of large schools. To the majority of teachers, social divisions were real and enduring, reinforced in their own experiences as workers subordinate to the whims of hostile parents, tight-fisted trustees, and idealistic educational leaders. Some teachers, like the more militant leaders of the RTA and VSSTA, identified their positions, along with other workers and the children of those workers, in class terms. Nonetheless, a growing propensity towards militancy did not necessarily signify complete teacher commitment to a vision of radical social transformation. As the ready assimilation of the RTA into the BCTF and the dissolution of the strike threat in 1943 indicated, teachers tended to be concerned most with alleviating specific teaching and living conditions in a given social and educational system.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has discussed recurrent tensions in British Columbia's teaching force in the first four decades of the twentieth century. Teachers during this time period fought for, and gained, several improvements in wages, employment standards, and working conditions that enhanced their professional status. The British Columbia Teachers' Federation was founded and guided initially by urban men teachers who sought a respectable professional organization that would reconcile priorities associated with improved teacher welfare with those of provincial educational management. However, as BCTF officials and other educational participants discovered, teacher professionalism and teaching work were of a contested rather than a fixed nature. As dependent state employees, teachers encountered substantial barriers to the fulfilment of their professional aspirations. Teaching conditions and occupational opportunities were experienced and responded to in distinct ways by men and women, rural and urban teachers, and segments of the teaching force distinguished by other material and ideological circumstances.

Teaching, as the British Columbia experience demonstrates, is a complex pursuit that is not driven by a unified occupational logic. Since the 1940s, there have been recurrent periods of intense conflict and relative harmony in the politics of public school teaching in the province. Teachers are committed to representation by a strong body to promote their interests in the province, but the form and nature of the BCTF remain open to contention. Teachers are fierce defenders of the need for a well-financed, equitable system of public education, as periodically expressed by their engagement in provincial election campaigns and wider struggles such as the Solidarity Coalition of the 1980s, but they are divided about whether or not and how best to express publicly their social and political stances. B.C. teachers are committed to principles of educational and social justice, but strong and sometimes bitter debates have raged around the BCTF's position on particular issues like poverty, racism, and sexism in and beyond the curriculum. Teaching, political by nature, remains a contradictory work form shaped and reshaped by shifting demands and conditions.

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