
The Teachers of British Columbia and Superannuation*

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The movement for teachers' pensions in British Columbia gained little momentum until well into this century, but the problem of the destitute teacher existed from the beginnings of education in the province. Teachers, in fact, were not always considered necessary and thus could not hope to be well cared for even when they were able to work. According to the regulations of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1836, the father of the family was to be encouraged to devote his leisure hours to the education of his children, and the first school in the province of British Columbia was not established until 1846, when Vancouver Island became a crown colony.¹ At that it was only a boarding school supported by the Company mainly to serve the children of Company employees. In 1852 a day school was set up, but this also was a private venture. Between 1853 and 1855 the Legislative Council built schools at Victoria, Craigflower, and Nanaimo, but all remained under the supervision of the chaplain of the Hudson's Bay Company.

The first free common school was opened in 1865 at Esquimalt.² The Common School Act was passed that year by the Legislative Assembly of

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¹F. Henry Johnson, *A history of public education in British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Publications Centre, 1962), p. 15.

²D. L. MacLaurin, *History of education in the crown colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia and in the province of British Columbia* (unpublished PhD thesis; Seattle: University of Washington, 1936), p. 43.

Vancouver Island but did not specify that the schools were to be free; it did require that they be open to all.³ Educational progress and the prosperity of the colony was short-lived for, by the union of 1866, the free school act became defunct, although in the absence of other legislation it remained technically in effect on Vancouver Island. The Board of Education attempted to maintain the schools but could not do so without funds, so that from 1866 to 1872 a period of educational recession was caused by a lack of money and the opposition of an uninterested governor who feared the results of education for the masses.

By 1868 six of the eleven schools that had been established under the act of 1865 had been discontinued for want of funds. The average salary of teachers dropped to \$65 a month, and no teacher earned more than \$75; many were also due back salary. An act for the establishment of public schools was passed in 1869 but was not implemented, as a tax for the support of the schools was vetoed. Want of money stifled any interest. The one bright spot in this period was the educational activity of the Roman Catholic church, for although it did not meet the desire for free universal non-sectarian education, it prevented a total collapse of education.⁴

The year 1872 was a turning point in the development of schools in this province. All previous legislation was repealed, and a system of free and non-sectarian education was established. The technical details of the plan are not critical for this study, but generally, from 1872 to 1888, the money for salaries and the maintenance of schools came from the provincial treasury. The first high school was established under this plan in 1876,⁵ and by 1884 there were 57 schools and 75 teachers.⁶ In 1888 the province accepted the principle of decentralized control of schools, and after 1890 it was general policy to extend opportunities. After 1910 the developments in education came rapidly and were numerous, and the Department of Education was set up in 1920 with its own minister.

The BC school system was thus fairly well established in 1876 when John Jessop, superintendent of schools, wrote: "The time has fully arrived for this Province to [establish] . . . a Super-annuated Teachers' Fund for the benefit of teachers when they arrive at a certain age. It would be almost

³Johnson, *History of public education*, p. 31.

⁴Sister Mary Margaret Down, *The sisters of Saint Ann: Their contribution to education in the Pacific Northwest, 1858-1958* (unpublished MA thesis; Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1962). This thesis gives an excellent history of the sisters of Saint Ann in BC and details their work in the educational field. They were probably the most important of the Catholic orders in the period considered and have always maintained the highest standards at their schools.

⁵MacLaurin, *Education in the crown colonies*, p. 276.

⁶H. H. Bancroft, *History of British Columbia* (San Francisco: History Company, 1890), pp. 737-8.

superfluous for me to enumerate the many advantages that must accrue to the profession from an arrangement of this description."⁷ Jessop did not anticipate that any teachers would have to draw from the fund until sometime in the following ten years. However, the fund he sought was not established in 1876, nor even in the 1880s. It was not until over half a century had elapsed that the teachers of British Columbia could look forward to a secure old age.⁸

In the federal sphere there was a parallel. Canada was not far behind European nations in thinking on the subject of old age pensions, but she was slower in acting. During the parliamentary session of 1906, a resolution was introduced in the federal House calling for something to be done at an early date for the needy aged. Twenty years later, in March 1926, the government sponsored an old age pensions bill. The bill was defeated in the Senate, but an almost identical one passed both the House and the Senate the following February.

By 1900 the teachers of British Columbia were in dire need of a pension plan or at least some dependable resource for their old age. Salaries were low compared to the trades and other professions, and no one disputed that teachers simply could not save enough to enable them to retire. As one rather irate lady teacher said: "I am a teacher in the Public Schools. If the teachers had decided on a means of supporting themselves in old age, I do not know it. The pittance which I have received has not enabled me to provide for the days when I cannot teach, and they are even now in the offing."⁹ Similarly, a sixty-eight-year-old teacher from Salmon Arm wrote: "I have not been able to provide for my old age from the pittance which I have been paid."¹⁰ This teacher had begun to feel unable to cope with the demands of the classroom and believed that she would be harming her pupils by remaining. She planned to retire at the end of the term but had no resources to fall back on. The following letter indicates that there were other teachers like her who were no longer fit, physically or mentally, to carry the burden of teaching but whose financial resources did not permit them to leave:

. . . Although I am able to teach with apparently as much effect as ever, I feel, at the end of each day's work, on the verge of collapse and have to hasten to get, for an hour, into a reclining position. Perhaps this is not surprising when

⁷British Columbia Department of Education, *Fourth annual report of the public schools of the province, 1876* (Victoria: Queen's Printer, 1876), p. 89.

⁸British Columbia Teachers' Federation, *B.C. Teacher* (March 1929), p. 3.

⁹Department of the Provincial Secretary, "Correspondence of Teachers," Microfilm Division. Public Archives of British Columbia, Victoria. Letter dated at Hudson's Hope, September 23, 1925, to the Civil Service Commission.

¹⁰Office of the Provincial Secretary, "Correspondence of the Education Department," microfilm series 4, roll 3. Letter of Miss Aileen Holliday, Salmon Arm, February 1925, to the Provincial Secretary.

back of it is 43 years of continuous service – 42 of which were in 6 of the B.C. rural schools.

You may reasonably ask why, after so long a service, not a bank balance or some other tangible asset to provide for old age. The answer is: Until the last five years my chief financial concern was to keep out of debt

The merciless hand of death deprived me of my wife when my only child was 11 years of age. But, in spite of this irreparable loss, the boy was wonderfully successful in his academic studies, winning the coveted Rhodes Scholarship from McGill, Montreal. While at Oxford, he volunteered for service in the war and won many decorations. He is now a cripple in London, a pensioner of the Imperial Government, and in the service of the League of Nations Union.

Had I saved the money required for the lad's education, there would probably be a few thousands to my credit in a bank now, but in my estimation it is far better to endure poverty and all it entails than to purchase affluence as such a cost.

It is indeed a sorry reflection on the vaunted educational process of the Province that the few pioneers who will stay with the teaching profession are destined to end their lives in penury.¹¹

Even officials of the Department of Education were poorly paid. The Superintendent of Education for the province resigned in 1883 with these words:

. . . the salary attached to my office is inadequate to the proper maintenance of the position and not in conformity with its admitted importance

. . . I am unwilling to much longer jeopardize my health and my prospects in life in a service that barely yields me a subsistence and that imposes on me besides all its other anxieties, that of the uncertainty of its continuance combined with the incessant care induced by the attempt to keep the wolf from the door¹²

What happened to teachers who wished to retire from the profession? What happened to those who were forced to retire by ill health brought about mainly by old age? What happened to those who became incapacitated in middle life? And what happened to the dependents, the wives and widows and children, of those who could no longer teach or who had died in harness? The answer, in the case of those who were able to teach but who no longer felt capable of doing so, was that they must simply fend for themselves. As few had even meagre savings, they were forced to continue in service or rely on charity. Although isolated cases may have occurred, there is no available record of any teacher receiving any pension, grant, or annuity from the local school board or the provincial government. The Salmon Arm teacher wrote that she had been refused any compensation by the local board; she was also refused aid by the province. Unless some breakdown in health occurred, a teacher was expected to

¹¹*B.C. Teacher* (September 1923), pp. 2-3, letter to the BCTF regarding pensions. Writer is not identified.

¹²Education Department, *Letter Book*, Office of the Provincial Secretary, 1882-84, p. 481, to John Robson, December 26, 1883, from C. C. Mackenzie.

continue to teach. Public opinion held that a "good" teacher was dedicated and would, therefore, serve until this was physically impossible. He would not ask for relief sooner.

There were many more cases of teachers who were actually physically incapable of carrying on and who had no savings to fall back on.¹³ In 1921, for example, a teacher in the North Vancouver school district was taken ill in the middle of her thirty-seventh year of teaching in the province. She was unable to continue and received no salary. In June 1922 she appealed to the school board for financial aid in the form of "some small annual gratuity," as her very limited savings had been exhausted in medical expenses. The board refused to aid her and she carried her appeal to the provincial government. The Education Department referred her to the school board, saying, in effect, that pensions were a local concern. No evidence is available as to whether she was successful on her second attempt at gaining compensation from the district. However, it seems safe to assume that she was not, for in April 1925 she died and her only relative, a sister, appealed to the province for aid in offsetting \$239 of debts that had been incurred in the last three years of the teacher's illness. The sister stated that she could not clear these debts herself and that the "penny-pinching" attitude of the governments, local and provincial, had cast a slur on their good family name by forcing them to appeal for charity.¹⁴ In 1924 there were eleven similar cases in the Education Department records. In only one instance was the teacher successful in winning any gratuity, and apparently this was secured only after three years of negotiation and appeal.¹⁵ The school district in which he had taught for fourteen of his thirty-five years of service finally granted him \$50 a month. The reason the grant was so small, the trustees informed the Minister of Education, was that the teacher in question was receiving aid from the local Salvation Army detachment. The remaining ten teachers were left to their own resources and charity.

There are fewer examples of teachers who became incapacitated in middle life, and the records are so sketchy that it is impossible to give a documented example. However, from what is available, it is possible to compare their fate generally with that of the older incapacitated teacher. Where an educator had served diligently for many years in one area, he

¹³Since the files from which these cases are taken are employment records and therefore confidential, the names of the teachers are omitted. All cases referred to may be found in the files of the Education Department, "Correspondence of Teachers" for the years mentioned. Microfilm series 1 to 6, Public Archives of British Columbia, Victoria.

¹⁴"Correspondence of Teachers," microfilm series 2, roll 3. Correspondence related to pensions, 1920-25.

¹⁵Record of teacher is not complete. "Correspondence of Teachers," microfilm series 3, roll 1. Teacher was in Surrey.

could usually count on generous support by his neighbours and church. If his service had been long enough and if the trustees of the district were so inclined, he might be granted a small maintenance. Teachers who were forced to leave the profession at an earlier age usually had not established a reputation in an area and were merely ignored. The public might aid them through charity, but school boards would hardly consider their service worth recognition.

This applied similarly to the kin of a deceased or incapacitated teacher. A school district might grant an allowance to an aging teacher, but this generally ended with his demise. The widow was expected to support herself. The families of young teachers might be left entirely adrift, although it was likely that the wife or widow might be offered the position that her husband had vacated. Families – parents, brothers, and sisters – were expected to come to the aid of these unfortunates. Only if their help was not available or sufficient did the local citizens consider it their own responsibility, and even then their charitable support was meagre and likely to be cut off at any time.

The conditions, then, for the retirement of teachers were not hopeful. Voluntary retirement was not considered acceptable. Even though the teacher himself might feel incapable and inadequate, he could not retire without calling his dedication into question. An actual physical breakdown was almost demanded as an excuse. The older incapacitated teacher might receive some aid from the school board if he had taught for a long period in the same area. This was generally granted, however, only after all other resources had been exhausted. The teacher was expected to live on his savings (if he had any), or be aided by relatives, or, lastly, to ask for charity from the district. The younger teacher who became incapacitated was unfortunate in that he had no claim against the district by virtue of long years of service. He was expected to find security with his relatives: his children might support him if they were old enough, or his wife might work. A widow and her children were expected to make their own way. It is important to note that the majority of teachers at retiring age were single unmarried women. Numerically, those most in need of a retirement plan were those women who had dedicated their lives to the service and were forced finally to vacate their positions by advancing years.

The conditions under which teachers worked – their poor wages and the lack of a retirement fund – indicate that the status of teachers was quite low. Teaching was not considered a profession; what was prized in an educator was not the quality of the instruction he might be capable of giving, but the number of years he might give it – his longevity. Teachers' status tended to remain static. The educational system could not demand more highly qualified people because it had no attractions for them or recompense appropriate to their skills. At the same time higher pay and more

security were difficult to demand and justify, because many teachers, although dedicated, were poorly trained.

In the early years of the twentieth century, some educators were striving to transform teaching from a temporary and often casual employment into a vocation exhibiting some of the systematic preparation, stability, progressiveness, and dignity of a profession. In British Columbia the standard of teaching service tended to be lowered by the presence of "many who intend to remain in it for only a short period, or to use it as a stepping stone."¹⁶ Teachers felt that this situation could be alleviated by paying greater attention to those factors which tended "to attract to, or retain in, the teaching profession many who would be likely to prove themselves very efficient and desirable teachers."¹⁷ Some of the means that were used were: professional training, both before and during active service; more permanent tenure; skilled supervision; and more attractive financial compensation.

In considering the idea of retirement allowances, three different points of view had to be kept in mind. There was, first, the attitude of the teacher interested in the question of whether pensions would be good for the profession. Second, the public, as an employer anxious for the welfare of the schools, was asked to support a retirement pension on the grounds that it would better the work of the schools. Third, the state was told to look on the idea of pensions for educators as one form of social insurance, which, whatever else it did, would encourage saving and thrift and ensure adequate protection against old age and disability.

Teachers said they advocated a system of pensions primarily with the ultimate good of the service in view. This ultimate good was governed almost wholly by considerations of the efficiency of teachers in performing their services to society. Consequently, nearly all of the questions concerning retirement allowances came back to the fundamental one: How, and in what ways, would the proposal react upon the efficiency of the profession as a whole? The teachers' answer was that a retirement system would improve efficiency by attracting and holding more desirable men and women, by guaranteeing to some extent the future of those engaged in it, thus creating an attitude of mind favourable to good work, and by the timely withdrawal of those who had given full service and were no longer able to meet the demands of the classroom.

Many educators and students of social economy believed that the systematic provision of retirement allowances for superannuated or otherwise incapacitated teachers would operate in a variety of ways towards making

¹⁶J. R. Putnam and G. M. Weir, *Province of British Columbia: Survey of the school system* (Victoria: King's Printer, 1925), p. 529. Hereafter referred to as *Putnam-Weir Report*.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 529.

teaching more attractive to those who were more qualified:

It would act as a powerful inducement not only in encouraging persons of ability and culture to adopt the profession, but in retaining them in it for a longer period. Public school teaching would not be regarded as merely a stepping-stone to something more remunerative when those engaged in it would be certain of receiving an annual stipend at a fixed age, when they would have the right to retire, or of aid should they be obliged through failing health to relinquish the profession sooner.¹⁸

Few employers would dismiss faithful servants who became incapacitated if these had no resources to fall back on. But in no other field was it so hard, as it was in the public school service, to find minor positions which aged and broken workers could take up without sacrificing their self-respect; certainly there was no other department where ailing and decrepit workers could do greater harm than in a classroom with forty or more impressionable young children:

Experience shows that the average community is sufficiently sympathetic to retain in its employ a teacher who has served long and faithfully but who through failing health, owing to advancing years, is no longer capable of really efficient service. The sympathies of the people influence their judgment. They gratify their sympathetic interests at the expense of their children.¹⁹

For example, the Superintendent reported on the conditions at the school in Yale in 1876:

The teacher, a man of culture and experience, after gradually growing worse and worse with consumption, was obliged to give up the school in June last. Discouraged probably by failing health, he seems to have neglected the school to an extent not surmised even by the trustees and parents, who were much too engrossed in business pursuits to give that attention to school matters which their importance demands.²⁰

It was, therefore, of greatest importance that the teaching service should be enabled to provide satisfactory retirement to workers who could no longer render the grade of service required. It was neither practical nor humane that school boards retire all unserviceable teachers, no matter what their financial circumstances, and "any large school is indeed fortunate if upon its staff there is no teacher the sole justification for whose continuance upon the staff is that he is there already."²¹

A teachers' pension plan would give to those in the active period of

¹⁸*Fourth annual report of the public schools of the province, 1876*, p. 89, "Superannuated Teachers' Fund," John Jessop, superintendent of education.

¹⁹*Putnam-Weir Report*, p. 320.

²⁰*Fourth annual report of the public schools of the province, 1876*, p. 109, "Yale District Report," John Jessop. During his years in office, Jessop made an effort to visit every school district and school personally to check conditions and instruction and equipment.

²¹Norman Fergus Black, *Peace and efficiency in school administration* (London and Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1926), p. 65.

their services a sense of security and opportunity for undivided attention to the profession. Teachers in general, and especially those capable of single-minded interest in service – unmarried women – were, for temperamental and other reasons, at a disadvantage in making investments except such as yielded lowest returns:

Experience . . . shows that teachers as a class are not shrewd investors of even the small savings they may be able to put aside. Perhaps this is largely accounted for by the fact that they mix but little with the business world and therefore lack the acumen which comes only through experience in practical affairs. They have little to invest. They know little about investing that little and their actual opportunity for making good investments is limited.²²

Teachers plainly did not make enough money to be able to save for their old age. It sounded reasonable to say that the teacher, like the farmer or grocer, should save enough during active service to support himself when he reached old age. But the simple fact was that low salaries made saving impossible. "The teacher with a family was fortunate if he could keep his children in shoes and stockings and give his wife a new bonnet every second year."²³

There was little doubt that society would gain by any successful attempt to render the teacher more secure as to the future and less preoccupied with the worry of business matters while in active service. The realization of such a condition would also weigh with those persons who would have the most to contribute to teaching and would encourage them to enter and remain in the profession. In 1925 there was "no apparent lack of teachers but the supply is overwhelmingly made up of young girls who have no thought of giving long periods of service. If the teaching profession is to be lifted to a higher level it must attract the kind of men and women who will make it a life-work."²⁴

But the dominant purpose of most early schemes attempted in North America was to make arrangements for the immediate retirement upon some kind of allowance of those who, through age or disability, were no longer able to discharge properly the duties of the classroom. Through a gratuity, more or less meagre, a means was provided whereby the school authorities could, without criticism or embarrassment, retire old and faithful employees on superannuation allowances. The general inadequacy of these allowances defeated in a large measure their purposes and their moral and social effects were hardly to the advantage of the welfare of the individual or the permanent good of the profession. Even when isolated districts did grant adequate pensions to superannuated instructors, the educational benefit to the state as a whole was questionable, since the school districts

²²*Putnam-Weir Report*, p. 320.

²³*Ibid.*, pp. 319-20.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 321.

concerned could attract and hold a few desirable teachers against other cities and towns. If every community had been required to grant retirement pensions, supported entirely out of the local treasury, to those who had by long years of service some claims to its bounty, teachers would have been forced to spend their lives in one school system in order to profit by the gratuity. Thus the mobility of the profession, one of the greatest sources of initiative and growth, would have been destroyed: "The needs of the Province require a mobile teaching force and this means a pension system which has a Province-wide base and one that will include every teacher in the Province. Such a system must derive its support from two sources and from two sources only: the Provincial Treasury and the earnings of the teachers."²⁵

In the majority of places the tenure of teachers was uncertain, depending on the caprice or prejudice of school authorities and the public, and in these places annuities would not work for the betterment of the service or the welfare of the profession. Some form of tenure had to be provided to safeguard the interest of both pupils and teachers. It was hoped that a public conscience, awake to the necessities of a retirement scheme, would develop a public sentiment that would support the principle of tenure during good behaviour and efficiency and then find a way to guarantee that efficiency.

In BC the teachers' needs would have been enough basis on which to make a strong appeal on compassionate grounds. But legislators usually base the spending of public money upon the benefit it will confer to the nation or province as a whole. Thus, when presenting their case to the government, the educators made use of the popular reasoning prevailing in European nations that retirement allowances were a good business investment, because they improved the teaching service in a way that no equal expenditure could: "Teaching – real teaching – is one of the most exhausting services known. It can be performed on a high plane only by men and women who are mentally keen and physically fit. A pension plan that would add two per cent. to the salary bill of the Province and increase the effectiveness of the teaching body by even three per cent. would be a good business investment."²⁶ At the same time, thrift was promoted, compulsory saving advanced, and the state protected itself, at least to some extent, against the social burden of supporting old teachers at the close of their period of usefulness in the classroom.

In British Columbia between 1900 and 1920, the cause of teachers' pensions gained additional strength from the growing recognition that, after all, they were only one part of a national movement of all workers demanding social insurance against the risks of life. European workers

²⁵*B.C. Teacher* (October 1927), p. 46.

²⁶*Putnam-Weir Report*, p. 321.

again blazed the way. Practically every European nation had passed some legislation safeguarding at least part of its work force against one or more of the risks of sickness, accident, disability, old age, and death. In almost every one of these countries, teachers' annuities of one kind or another had been a forerunner or entering wedge for the protection of other and larger groups of workers. In some cases, insurance for teachers had paralleled similar legislation for other classes of citizens.²⁷

A Provincial Superannuation Act was passed in BC in 1921, and an attempt was made to bring the teachers into the scheme. The government, however, took the stand that

. . . they were in no sense the employers of the teachers and that they would not undertake the contribution of the required equivalent of the teachers contributions.

They considered that this duty devolved upon the School Boards of the Province

At this time the Provincial employees were being granted a superannuation act with the Government making the duplication of contributions. . . . The Government offered to make the same act apply to the teachers with the proviso . . . that the School Boards make the employers' contributions . . . but it was left optional on the Boards to adopt this scheme as they desired. When the Act was in the Legislature, an amendment was added making it impossible for any School Board to enter into a superannuation agreement with its teachers *without the consent of the Municipal Council*.

The Federation felt that the Act was of little value

[This] . . . has been amply proven by the fact that no teacher has ever been placed under the Act.²⁸

Teachers had had little success in gaining pensions, as well as in improving conditions and salaries, because they lacked a real voice in politics. They were poorly organized and could not as a group apply pressure to the government; nor did they have a defender in the legislature. Teachers' institutes did not exist independently of the Education Department until 1916, and the British Columbia Teachers' Federation was not incorporated until 1919,²⁹ when "a new spirit of self-assurance seemed to pervade the ranks of the teachers. . . . They seemed no longer willing to accept mutely the indignation of what traditionally had been the lot of the public school

²⁷Perhaps the most comprehensive and useful discussion of European pension plans can be found in "Old age pensions abroad" in the *Labour Gazette* (Ottawa, March 1926). Reprinted in *Selected articles on old age pensions*, edited by L. T. Beman, (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1927), pp. 7-45. See also: Canada, Department of Labour, *Old age pensions in Canada* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1929); Helen Fisher Hohman, *Old age in Sweden*, Federal Security Agency, Social Security Board (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1944); BC Department of the Provincial Secretary, *First annual report on the administration of the "Old Age Pensions Act," 1943-44* (Victoria: King's Printer, 1944).

²⁸*B.C. Teacher* (October 1927), pp. 44-5.

²⁹Johnson, *History of public education*, p. 239.

teacher. There was evidence of a new pride in their role, and of a determination to win the recognition they felt their profession deserved."³⁰

This new spirit was first evident in 1919, when the teachers of Victoria struck for two days, and in 1921 the teachers of New Westminster left the classrooms. In both cases the disputes centred around salary increases. The Victoria strike led to the amendment of the Public Schools Act that established arbitration procedures; in New Westminster the school board had refused to arbitrate, but an intervening election returned a board favourable to the teachers' demands.³¹ Although the teachers did not win a great victory on either occasion, the strikes did demonstrate that they were growing in strength and organization. Salaries were the main concern of the Federation in the early years, but at the same time the teachers continued to put pressure on the government for pensions. In 1927, the *B.C. Teacher* reported:

At last, we have secured a tangible advance and have paved the way for what we hope will be a very early adoption of a General Superannuation scheme.

At the last session of the Legislature, the sum of \$6,000 was voted to be used as a retiring allowance for teachers, who . . . were unable to continue in the teaching profession. At the present time, therefore, as a result of this action, a number of old teachers are receiving a monthly allowance, which, though not as much as they deserve yet, is sufficient to assure that they will not be in actual want.³²

It is interesting to note that the teachers' cause was supported in the legislature by the Labour members, especially by R. H. Neelands.³³ It is even more important, perhaps, that the Federation was affiliated with the Trades and Labour Congress, the only provincial federation to have established relations with the trade union movement.³⁴

The subject of old age pensions had always been before the Labour Congress, and in 1905 it adopted a recommendation that the time was "opportune to introduce legislation making provision for the maintenance of deserving poor, old and disabled citizens, who are unable to maintain themselves"³⁵ By 1912 their efforts towards securing legislation were

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 240.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 240-1.

³²*B.C. Teacher* (June 1927), p. 2.

³³Vancouver *Province*, December 17, 1925, p. 12. See also the *Province* for March 2, 1927, p. 2; and the Vancouver *Sun*, December 17, 1925, p. 18.

³⁴H. A. Logan, *Trade unions in Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1948), pp. 503-5. Quote of resolution of the TLC included. The relation of the BCTF to the labour movement has never been fully investigated, and most histories of the Federation do not even consider it. It was probably much more important and deep-rooted than is apparent.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 504, resolution of TLC.

successful in getting a committee appointed by the House of Commons to consider the establishment of a pension system. The TLC made representations to the various committees during and after the war and to the royal commission on pensions. The Old Age Pensions Act was finally passed in 1927, and it must be admitted that the labour organizations were a factor in the struggle, although perhaps not the major one.

In 1929, after repeated representations to the government, the teachers won a province-wide pensions system based on joint contributions of the teachers and the government. The Superannuation Committee of the BCTF had drafted the bill at the request of the government, and it was hailed by the Federation as a great step forward in raising the status of the profession:

Perhaps no single factor will be found to result in a greater measure of improvement to the service being rendered in the schools than the adoption of a scheme whereby teachers, young and old, can look forward without anxiety to the time of their retirement from active work in the profession. Teachers will now, as never before, be able, in the interest of their schools, to devote their individual attention to the improvement of class-room technique, the enrichment of their educational experience, and to the raising of the status of the profession.³⁶

Through continued pressure on the government made possible by organization and labour support, the teachers had at last won some plan for their old age security.

Why did the teachers organize and finally win improvements in conditions after the first world war? Part of the explanation must surely lie in J. T. Pollack's comment that "the teaching staffs have been strengthened to no small degree by the return to the classroom of so many men who have been away in service overseas. There is a marked desire among teachers to raise the status of the profession."³⁷ The return of servicemen had certainly been a factor in the labour cause in the rest of Canada. Gross disparity existed between the immense rise in the cost of living and the increase in wages, and the labourer's outlook was darker because of the disbanding of the armies.³⁸ Hand in hand with postwar political unrest went industrial dissatisfaction. During the 1920s labour organized more rapidly and ambitiously than ever before, the most famous examples of

³⁶*B.C. Teacher*, n.d.

³⁷*Fifty-eighth annual report of the public schools of the province, 1920-21*, p. C25, S. J. Willis, superintendent of education.

³⁸There was a shortage of teachers for the early years of the 1920s and yet teachers' salaries remained the same from 1921 to 1928 (average salary). In 1929 the minimum rate for both men and women was lowered by \$500, and the maximum was raised about \$200. Robert Francis Cunningham, *The latecomer to teaching in B.C.* (unpublished MA thesis; Seattle: University of Washington, 1963), appendix, table of teachers' salaries.

labour unrest in Canada at the time being the Winnipeg General Strike and the growth of the movement for the One Big Union.³⁹

We must, then, consider that the BC teacher prior to 1920 was a member of what the public considered a labouring class. After the first world war the attitudes of the people and the governments about social welfare changed, although civil servants and war wounded were given consideration well ahead of the aged teacher or other citizens. The labour and trade groups organized to take advantage of the political, economic, and social unrest that followed the war and thus to bring changes in the status of the labouring class. In the same manner, the BCTF organized to take advantage of its new found strength in the returned servicemen and the change in public attitudes.⁴⁰ The teachers' movement in BC was part of a national movement for labour organization and involvement in welfare programs. The Teachers' Federation was directly associated with the TLC, and the work of the Federation for pensions can be considered as a parallel to that of the Labour Congress in the field of federal old age pensions. Similarly, the rise of the labouring class is comparable to the teachers' rise in status to that of a recognized profession. Pensions were not the only factor involved, but they were still essential in the educator's "status cycle." Higher wages and pensions allowed boards to attract and demand better qualified people; both of these factors gave the profession a higher place in the eyes of the community. This status in turn allowed them to claim further salary increases and more security, which attracted still better people. The teachers had concentrated on different aspects at different times: once they had gained improvements in salaries or at least a better negotiating position, they worked for pensions and higher qualifications. The minimum qualification for elementary teachers was raised in 1922, and professional training courses were begun at the University of British Columbia in 1926-27.⁴¹

The fight for higher status continues today. Qualifications have risen far faster than salary or status. The teacher is by no means considered a labourer, but teachers believe that they have not the status of a profession

³⁹Union histories: A. Andras, *Labour unions of Canada* (Woodsworth House Publishers); James C. Cameron and F. J. C. Young, *The status of trade unions in Canada* (Kingston: Queen's University, Department of Industrial Relations, 1960); Logan, *Trade unions in Canada* (this is perhaps the most comprehensive book available on the early history of Canadian trade unions).

⁴⁰It seems that it would be fairly easy to account for the weakness and ineffectiveness of teachers in the early years of the twentieth century, when it is remembered that the teaching service was made up almost entirely of young girls who intended to work only short periods. The retiring teachers were mostly elderly single ladies. Neither group took any active part in political affairs as this was not considered a woman's place. Women did not have the provincial vote until 1922, and politicians did not consider their voice, united or disunited, a threat.

⁴¹Johnson, *History of public education*, p. 120.

to which their long years of training would seem to entitle them. The pension plan of the BC teacher is now integrated into the Canadian Pension Plan, and though that may be considered no longer a point of debate, the teachers' problem today is the same as it was in the 1920s: how to raise the status of the teaching profession.