

# LABOUR HISTORY

vol. 2; no. 1



"Blessed are they who expect little, for they shan't be disappointed."

W.H. MacInnis,  
Civil Service Commissioner, 1919

ISSN: 0706-8441 Labour History  
Cover Photo: *Dietary Aids, North Van Hospital*  
15 Nov., 1955. *Courtesy Vancouver*  
*Public Library.*

Vol 2; No. 1  
Spring 1979

LABOUR HISTORY is a publication of:

## THE LABOUR HISTORY ASSOCIATION

BRITISH COLUMBIA TEACHERS' FEDERATION  
105-2235 BURRARD STREET  
VANCOUVER, B.C. V6J 3H8



# CONTENTS

	PAGE
Mailbox .....	1
Glossary .....	2
Terminology .....	3
Introduction: Labour in the Public Sector/ Mark Bostwick .....	4
V.M.R.E.U. - Inside City Hall/ Addie Derby .....	10
To Cross the Rubicon/ Colleen Bostwick .....	12
C.U.P.E. - Structured for Democracy/ Betty Merrall .....	25
A Great Debate .....	29
Lesson Plan: A Great Debate/ Gary Onstad .....	33
Review/ Peter Seixas .....	35

TYPING/LAYOUT/EDITING: Colleen Bostwick

Contributors to this issue are: Betty Merrall, Addie Derby, Mark Bostwick, Gary Onstad, Peter Seixas, Colleen Bostwick, Denis Ottewell.

SPECIAL THANKS to the staff at the B.C. Government Employees Union for their generous assistance during research for this issue, and to Joyce Felt in particular. All cartoons used in this issue are taken from the *Provincial*, the BCGEU union journal.

layout by volunteer labour - printed in a union shop



# mailBox

All correspondence to the editor should be addressed to: Labour History, c/o The B.C. Teachers' Federation. Letters must be signed; however, names are withheld upon request.

EDITOR: Over the past two years a number of individuals have been involved in creating a set of readers quite unlike others now available. A detailed description would be too lengthy, but basically they are designed to reflect the social reality in which working class children live. In so doing, they emphasize concrete elements of that culture, such as ethnicity, location, family forms, etc.

Presently there are 5 sets of stories all set in the Toronto-Hamilton area. Each set focuses on some central characters in their communities--ie. two Italian-Canadian children, a black Jamaican boy, and so on.

James Lorimer & Co. (publisher) is interested in expanding the geographical and social boundaries of the series to include significant minority groups in Vancouver and Halifax. The readers will be designed for Grade 4 reading level.

Those interested in this project can contact me at work: 291-3587/3687 or at my home: 921-9160.

Rowly Lorimer  
West Vancouver, B.C.

\* \* \*

EDITOR: Thank-you for the excellent resource material in Vol. 1; No. 4 of Labour History. My Social Studies 11 students found the information to be very interesting and were particularly impressed with your first-hand accounts. They have followed your example and are interviewing friends and family who experienced the Depression. We plan to collect their interviews in a booklet to be used in our school as resource material. Will send you a copy.

Marta MacKown  
Elphinstone Secondary  
Gibsons, B.C.

\* \* \*

EDITOR: The study of the history of "labour" in Canada within the school system is conspicuous by its absence. The

struggle of working people to maintain an orderly work environment that encourages long-term planning so necessary to family life has been recorded--yet little time is devoted to its study within the school system. Study units appropriate to classroom presentation must be developed.

The Labour History PSA addresses itself to this task, whether it is through lesson plans such as "Bloody Sunday" (Vol 1; No. 4), or through slide shows such as "These Were the Reasons." Labour History articles are appropriate for classroom study. Educators throughout the country will surely welcome this leadership.

Tim Frizzel, Trustee  
School District #46  
Sechelt, B.C.

\* \* \*

EDITOR: Have now read your latest Labour History on the Depression - I think it's the best yet. One point: I think you might have mentioned that some of the pictures came from Al Knight's rodriding days. Working people's history and lives are anonymous enough as it is and should be remembered by name where possible.

Rolf Knight  
Burnaby, B.C.

\* \* \*

EDITOR: The latest issue of Labour History continues the publication's progression towards excellence. It makes me proud to be a member.

To see in writing the rich tradition of working people in this country is indeed heartwarming. For years I have taken great pleasure in hearing the stories and reminiscences of those who actively participated in the making of our history, but who were too insignificant or threatening to be written about. The children I teach and my own son are not going to be able to hear this history as I did. Their only source will be from publications like Labour History.

Al Blakey, 1st V.P.  
B.C. TEACHERS' FED.

*Labour History* Spring 1979/1



# Glossary

All Definitions (except "Charter") taken from "No. 5 - Glossary of Labour Terms" in *Notes on Unions*, published intermittently by the Public Relations Department of the Canadian Labour Congress.

**AGREEMENT, COLLECTIVE** - A contract (agreement and contract are used interchangeably) between one or more unions acting as *bargaining agent*, and one or more employers, covering wages, hours, working conditions, fringe benefits, rights of workers and union, and procedures to be followed in settling disputes and *grievances*.

**ARBITRATION** - A method of settling disputes through the intervention of a 3rd party whose decision is final and binding. Such a 3rd party can be either a single arbitrator, or a board consisting of a chairperson and one or more representatives. Arbitration is often used to settle major grievances and for settling contract interpretation disputes. Voluntary arbitration is that agreed to by the parties without statutory compulsion. Compulsory arbitration is that imposed by law. Governments sometimes impose it to avoid a strike or to end one.

**BARGAINING AGENT** - Union designated by a labour relations board or similar government agency as the exclusive representative of all employees in a *bargaining unit* for the purposes of *collective bargaining*.

**BARGAINING UNIT** - Group of workers in a craft, department, plant, firm, industry or occupation, determined by a labour relations board or similar body as appropriate for representation by a union for purposes of *collective bargaining*.

**CHECKOFF** - A clause in a collective agreement authorizing an employer to deduct union dues and, sometimes, other assessments, and transmit these funds to the union. There are four main types: 1) *Voluntary revocable*; 2) *Voluntary irrevocable*; 3) *Compulsory*; 4) *Rand Formula* - dues deducted from union and non-union employees.

**COLLECTIVE BARGAINING** - Method of determining wages, hours and other conditions of employment through direct negotiations between the union and employer. Normally the result of collective bargaining is a written contract which covers all employees in the bargaining unit, both union members and non-union members.

**CONCILIATION and MEDIATION** - A process which attempts to resolve labour disputes by compromise or voluntary agreement. By contrast with arbitration the mediator, conciliator or conciliation board does not bring in a binding award and the parties are free to accept or to reject its recommendation. The conciliator is often a government official while the mediator is usually a private individual appointed as a last resort, sometimes even after the start of a strike.

**CRAFT UNION** - Also called *horizontal union*. A trade union which organizes on the principle of limiting membership to some specific craft or skill, i.e., electricians, plumbers, etc. In practice many traditional craft unions now also enroll members outside the craft field, thereby resembling *industrial unions*.

**FEDERATION OF LABOUR** - A federation, chartered by the Canadian Labour Congress, grouping *local unions* and *labour councils* in a given province.

**FRINGE BENEFITS** - Non-wage benefits, such as paid vacations, pensions, health and welfare provisions, life insurance, etc., the cost of which is borne in whole or in part by the employer.

**GRIEVANCE** - Complaint against management by one or more employees, or a union, concerning an alleged breach of the collective agreement or an alleged injustice. Procedure for the handling



of grievances is usually defined in the agreement. The last step of the procedure is usually arbitration.

**INDUSTRIAL UNION** - Also called *Vertical Union*. A trade union which organizes on the principle of including all workers from one industry, regardless of their craft or whether they are skilled or unskilled. See *Craft union*.

**INJUNCTION** - A court order restraining an employer or union from committing or engaging in certain acts. An *ex parte* injunction is one in which the application for an injunction is made in the absence of the party affected.

**LABOUR COUNCIL** - Organization composed of *locals* of CLC-affiliated unions in a given community or district.

**LABOUR RELATIONS BOARD (LRB)** - A board established under provincial or federal labour relations legislation to administer labour law, including certification of trade unions as bargaining agents, investigation of unfair labour practices and other functions prescribed under the legislation.

**LOCAL (UNION)** - also known as *lodge* or *branch*. The basic unit of a union organization. Trade unions are usually divided into a number of locals for the purposes of local administration. These locals have their own constitutions and elect their own officers; they are usually responsible for the negotiation and day-to-day administration of the collective agreements covering their members.

**PER CAPITA TAX** - Regular payments by a local to its national or international union, labour council or federation, or by a union to its central labour body. It is based on the number of members.

**RAND FORMULA** - Also called *Agency Shop*. A *union security* clause in a collective agreement stating that the employer agrees to deduct an amount equal to the union dues from all members of a bargaining unit, whether or not they are members of the union, for the duration of the collective agreement. See *Checkoff*.

**SENIORITY** - Term used to designate an employee's status relative to other

employees, as in determining order of lay-off, promotion, recall, transfer, vacations, etc. Depending on the provisions of the collective agreement, seniority can be based on length of service alone or on additional factors such as ability or union dues.

**CERTIFICATION** - Official designation by a labour relations board or similar government agency of a union as sole and exclusive bargaining agent, following proof of majority support among employees in a bargaining unit.

**CHARTER** - A written grant of rights by a parent body which recognizes certain privileges of the chartered party. A charter is extended, for example, by the Canadian Labour Congress to its affiliates.

## Terminology

Union members in the public sector describe themselves in a special way. Some of the terms may be unfamiliar to you. A few explanations may help.

It is no longer common practice to speak of *public servants*. The term *servant* has unpleasant and misleading connotations for workers in the public sector.

It is more common to hear the phrase *public employee* since this describes more accurately their exact relationship on the job. But the word *employee* only connotes the relationship between the employer and the person doing the job, and not the content of the job. So an even more accurate term is *public sector worker*. This phrase is rapidly gaining usage among public sector unions.

The phrase *government employee* or *government worker* is also declining in usage. There are two reasons for this. First, the word "Government" contributes to the confusion between *Government* (the party in power), the *government* (the legislative institutions and ministries) and *government worker* who does not make laws or policies, but only works in the government.

Secondly, public sector employment no longer means *only* employment by a federal, provincial or municipal government. The creation of crown corporations /cont. p.36

## Introduction

# Labour in the Public Sector

MARK BOSTWICK

In this issue of *Labour History* we take a look at unions and workers in the public sector. We discover that these workers share with their brothers and sisters in the private sector a long and exciting history.

Yet no area of the labour movement is so misunderstood by the public. That which is considered custom and right for many workers is still a contentious issue in the public sector. Groups of public employees have been seeking these rights since at least 1891, when letter carriers formed themselves into a federation -- the first known union of public employees. In 1898, the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada organized the first Federal Local Union in Moncton, New Brunswick. By 1900 there were 21 such charters across Canada, bringing together civic and/or federal employees. Despite this long history, it has only been in the last generation that many of the most fundamental rights were accepted by employers and large segments of the public.

Public sector unionism (i.e., unions of workers employed by governments, crown corporations, quasi-public utilities, school boards, etc.) has not received the attention it deserves. Some of the material in this issue comes from pioneering research into primary sources. A great deal remains to be written.

The issues, the structures, the unique features of the topic make for a very complex story. Along the way contributors to *Labour History* have provided sidebars and tables to help make your understanding easier. But it is not a simple story.

It is an important one, however. Public sector unions are growing more rapidly than those of any other part in organized labour. In the decisions that organized labour makes as a whole, the views and leadership of unions representing public employees are heard more often. The work that members of these unions do is important to all of us -- sometimes vitally important.

\* \* \*

### From Servants to Employees

The origins of government employment are found in the era of Kings and Queens who surrounded themselves with advisors and helpers who owed a personal allegiance to the ruler. These servants took a personal oath to the ruler and served at his or her pleasure.

The feeling of service remained long after governments became more democratic and grew into larger organizations. Modern governments employ thousands of workers who do many different jobs. Employees are not servants nor cheap labour surviving on crumbs from the monarch's table. The servants of old have become workers who sell

their labour in return for wages. They are employees.

The sense of service remains. But public sector employees also demand recognition of their rights as employees. These rights could not be gotten so long as public employees made no distinction between the Government as the representatives of the people, and government as the employer, or boss, of government workers. The public, too, must be convinced that just because a man or woman works for the government he or she is not a slave to be abused or treated with disrespect.

Once it was understood that public servants were public employees, it was easier to accept the need for these employees to



have an organization of their own to represent their interests as workers. At first public employees formed associations (or federations) which asked the employer to listen to their needs. Later most of these associations became unions which negotiated with the employer for better wages and working conditions, signed written contracts, and looked after the needs of its members.

Public employees still recognize a special obligation to serve the public, but they ask in return fair treatment and union representation as public employees. Some public employees do not have a recognized right to full collective bargaining even now. Teachers, for example, are such a group.

### Variety in Membership

Union organization has traditionally taken root among workers sharing the same skill (i.e., craft unions of carpenters or plumbers) or workers at the same work-site producing a similar product or service (i.e., industrial unions like the I.W.A.). Public employees are unique.

There are many different jobs to be done and public employees may work in every corner of a province or city. Public employees are snowplow operators and social workers; engineers and ferry workers; elementary school secretaries and airplane pilots; nurses and nuclear hazard specialists. Public employees work in gloomy caverns filled with medical records, and out on the roads during the fiercest storms.

Building a union of workers doing so many different jobs in many different locations was a difficult task. Even the workers themselves sometimes felt they did not belong with one another in the same union.

Labour's struggle to overcome this obstacle resulted in organizational variety and differences in structure. There are public service unions whose members are mostly federal government employees. In B.C. most provincial employees belong to the British Columbia Government Employees' Union (although some professionals belong to another organization, the B.C. Government Professional Employees Association).

Many municipal employees belong to the



*North Vancouver Hospital, November 1955.  
Courtesy of Vancouver Public Library.*

Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), but there are separate locals for "inside workers", "outside workers" and school board employees, etc. in each locality. Some municipal workers belong to unions other than CUPE - in Vancouver many are members of the Vancouver Municipal and Regional Employees' Union.

While there are many different structures, each union has tried to establish a structure that best meets the needs of the membership. At the same time each union works to bring the members together. There are annual conventions, periodic workshops, special schools and educational programs that bring workers from each part of the union to discuss common problems, share information and get to know one another. Each union has a union newspaper, and often local sections produce a newsletter.

All these things help the membership feel a part of the union. A strong sense of participation is what makes a union strong and effective.

## Solidarity

Bringing public employees together into a union was a long hard process. Bringing public employees together with other organized workers was even more difficult.

One barrier to the sense of solidarity between public employees and other workers (and the public) was a confusion between employees and politicians. Some people contribute to this confusion by blaming the tax collector for the tax, the policemen for the bad law, the social workers for the social problems, the teacher for the education system.

This is unfair. The politicians make the laws, not the public employee who works for a government. Individuals who do not like the party in power or the policies of Government sometimes unfairly criticize the man or woman who works in a government or public job. We have all heard public employees called "bureaucrats", "pencil pushers" or even "parasites." These are terms used by people who want to beat the wrong horse or who don't understand how hard and difficult a public job may be.

Who would disagree that the provincial scaler who flies through stormy weather to check logs in mountain valleys has a dangerous job? Who thinks that the municipal worker who cleans up a gas leak has a soft life? What about all the public employees who are out working when a bridge goes out, a road needs to be plowed, or an accident victim taken care of? Standing behind a desk day in day out, year after year, politely listening to people complain is not exactly a "cushy" job either. Hospital employees and social workers often deal with people-problems of the most serious kind. Still prejudices remain.

What have unions done to reduce these mistaken impressions? Public sector unions have joined with other unions in organizations like the B.C. Federation of Labour and the Canadian Labour Congress, and are active participants in local labour councils. Education - of both the public and of brother/sister trade unionists - is important to break down many of the false barriers which have, in the past, isolated public employees in the community and in the workforce.

Public employees take pride in their unions. You will often see a union member

wearing a small pin or a jacket emblem that identifies the union. In some cases there is even a decal on a Government building - placed there after employees have won the right to identify their workplace as a "union shop."

Finally, it is worth pointing out that public jobs are created because people -- through their government -- want them. Individuals may disapprove of this or that specific job (prisoners might like to see fewer prison guards, corporations might like to see fewer pollution inspectors), but overall, all public jobs are the result of public decisions.

As one official of a public sector union puts it: "These services and enterprises exist in response to two sets of demands: One is the demand by private industry, made over time, for services it needs to maintain itself and to expand: roads, railways, power, communications. The other is the demand by working people for social services: health care, education, social welfare, transit and many others."

All of these services are scrutinized annually when the federal or provincial or municipal or school board budgets are made.

Flood Clean-up, 15 January 1961.  
Courtesy Van. Public Library.



\*John L. Fryer, General Secretary, B.C. Government Employees Union, "Public vs Private Wage Comparisons."



## The State is a Very Powerful Employer

Public employees must negotiate with a boss who has exceptional powers. Public sector unions bargain with an employer more powerful than the typical private corporation. The imbalance between the state-as-employer and the public employee union has been profoundly important in the development of labour relations.

### Legislation

The state, unlike a private company, can protect itself from the workers it employs by passing laws. In most provinces of Canada provincial employees, for example, are covered by special legislation. This means that improvements won by workers in the private sector are not automatically granted to public employees (and vice versa). The use of the powers of the legislature have been a constant concern for public sector workers.

### Essential Service

The services provided by workers in private companies are rarely essential to the protection of life and limb. In the public sector some services are essential. Certain aspects of police protection, of fire fighting and of health care are generally agreed to be essential.

The problem here is not that public sector unions wish to withhold these truly essential services during a strike. The problem is agreeing on what is an essential service and what is merely a convenient service. Who should decide this question? The B.C. Federation of Labour, which looks after the interests of many affiliated unions and is concerned about public issues, tries to establish a credible list of truly essential services. Some unions, like the B.C. Government Employees Union, have provisions in their contract with the employer. This establishes a procedure for distinguishing between the essential and the convenient.

The problem arises when politicians are tempted to take an easy out when any conflict occurs: it is easier to mis-use the generally understood meaning of essential service. This mis-use can be a very powerful weapon against workers.

### Patronage

Favouritism is one of the unnecessary evils that make life miserable for many workers. Having to depend on family ties or on buttering up the boss for a job or promotion is unfair - but it also forces workers to compete with one another for the boss's favour. Workers and unions have always fought favouritism and argued that jobs and promotions should be based on skill and length of service.

Favouritism or patronage was a serious problem in government. Even today it is not uncommon for victorious politicians to pay off election debts by offering jobs and contracts to their friends, their friends' friends, their relatives and so on.

Public attitudes towards corrupt patronage have gradually changed as civic-minded reformers and organized labour have exposed the problem and called for fair methods of hiring and promotion. The struggle against patronage helped make unions popular among public sector workers.

### Politics

A fourth problem facing public employees is that their strikes are often called political. Unions are sometimes accused of bargaining in bad faith - of using the negotiating table to score political points rather than to seek agreements for their members.

On the other side, public employee unions have sometimes felt like they were punching bags for politicians seeking to gain votes.

In reality, strikes in the public service are rare, and 'political strikes' are still more rare. Most strikes involve "bread and butter issues" like wages and working conditions. Sometimes strikes occur because public employees seek to protect existing rights (like collective bargaining).

Sometimes 'politics' is used another way. In the old days politicians would sometimes offer public employees wage increases just before election time in hopes of buying votes. The unions do not oppose wage increases, but they do oppose this kind of political bribery.

The union solution to all these problems is very simple. The relationship between



the public employer and the public employees should be carried on through the method of collective bargaining.

Collective bargaining means determining wages, hours and other conditions of work through direct, across-the-table negotiations with the employer. Normally the result of collective bargaining is a written contract (to which both parties agree) signed by both sides.

Experience suggests that collective bargaining is the best way to settle many of the problems that arise in the course of employment. It takes good faith on both sides, of course. Public sector bargaining often works best if the union negotiates with essentially professional civil servants who have experience in labour relations. When politicians enter the fray, it often means trouble.

It took a long time for public employees to gain the right to bargain collectively. In B.C., for example, provincial government employees did not get this right until 1974. And many unions feel (and not without justification) that this right is always in jeopardy.

#### Who Pays?

When unions in the private sector negotiate better wages, the employer has two choices: profits can be affected (this rarely happens) or prices can be increased (this happens and often with an extra slice for the owner).

But when public employees improve their wages politicians sometimes charge that taxes have to be increased. (Ironically, when a strike occurs in the private sector, corporate profits may be hurt. In public employment, the government may cut services and actually save money). The public sometimes feel that better public employee wages mean higher taxes -- and this is never popular. Public employee unions have to be very careful in their negotiations.

The unions point out that public employees are also tax payers and should not be treated like servants; they deserve decent wages because they do good work and have families to support just like everybody else. In fact, we should be proud of the public employees who serve all of us. Chiselling the state worker reflects on our government and on ourselves.

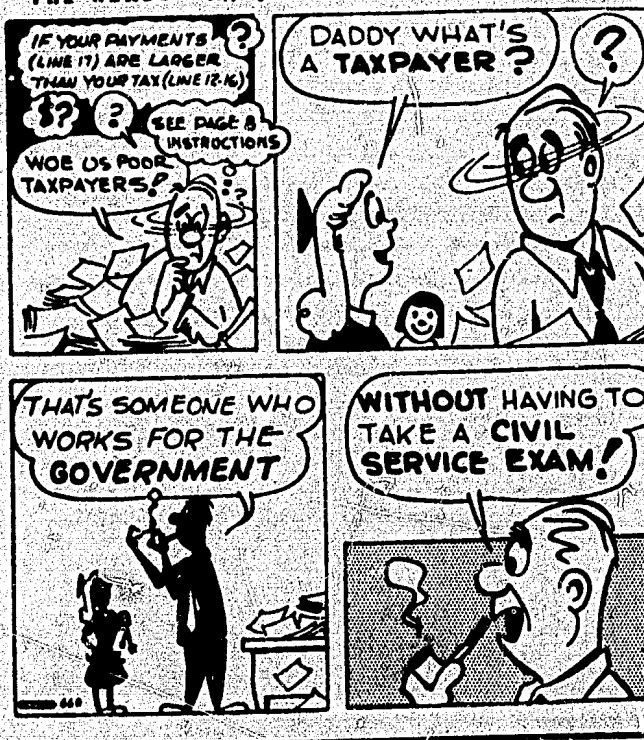
Today most public employees make less than their counterparts in the private sector. The gap between the two sectors sometimes widens and sometimes narrows.

Some people think that public employees should always get the short end of the stick. Others say that public employees deserve equal pay with their counterparts in the private sector (called "parity"). After all, a job is a job, and just because you work for a government or crown corporation or hospital administration doesn't make the job any easier or the dollar stretch any farther. And some feel that we, the people of our community, should be the best employer.

Still there are those high taxes...

The tax system itself is often unfair. Those who benefit most from government services often pay the lowest taxes, while those who benefit the least pay the highest. Those who support public workers argue that there would be plenty of money to pay our public employees decent wages if the tax system were made more fair. But, this is a question each citizen must ask him/herself: what is a fair tax system?

#### THE HERBS Copyrighted - Labor Features by Kallias





In this issue only some of the topics raised in the introduction are dealt with. The article on the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) describes the structure of the union and how it seeks to combine services with a strong local orientation.

The article, "To Cross the Rubicon" takes a look at the long and difficult struggle for full recognition for B.C. provincial government employees.

The article by Addie Derby on the VMREU gives us a glimpse of City Hall employees in Vancouver, and the reasons they have chosen to remain an organized group.

The lesson plan and accompanying article, "A Great Debate," give us ideas for using the summary of an important debate which has taken place in all public sector unions: the pros and cons of affiliation to organized labour.

The Glossary of Labour Terms will prove very useful, as there are many words and expressions throughout this issue which many readers will be unfamiliar with.

Finally, there is one theme which we hope will be clear in this issue: public employees feel very strongly about the need for a union to protect their rights as workers, while they clean up our roads, teach our children, drive our buses, tend to our forests, provide us with water and gas and light, connect our telephones, execute all the business of governments, care for us when we are ill, transport our food, protect our literature, help control pollution of our environment, rescue us when we're in danger--.



Government workers, by level of government, 1946-74 (selected years)

Year	Federal	Provincial	Municipal	Total	Gov't workers as percentage of all workers
1946	146,257	64,991	67,120	278,368	6.0
1951	145,720	102,050	87,070	334,840	7.2
1956	185,885	138,239	118,278	442,402	7.9
1961	231,136	200,343	171,521	613,000	10.1
1966	258,281	299,047	256,716	814,044	11.4
1971	321,050	394,431	361,726	1,977,207	13.3
1974	349,340	449,825	386,902	1,186,067	13.0
1946-74 Increase	203,083	384,834	319,782	907,699	
Percentage Increase	138.9	592.1	476.4	326.1	

Source: Hugh Armstrong, "The Labour Force and State Workers in Canada," in *The Canadian State*, ed. Leo Panitch.



# VMREU ~ Inside City Hall

ADDIE DERBY

*Addie Derby started working for the City of Vancouver in 1959. Ten years later she was elected the first woman President of the Vancouver City Hall Employees Association, which became, in 1970, the Vancouver Municipal and Regional Employees Union. She served as President until 1973. Ms. Derby is presently a member of the Canadian Pension Plan Advisory Committee of the Federal Government, and in addition to her full time job at Vancouver City Hall, is teaching Labour Relations in the night school program at the B.C. Institute of Technology.*

The Vancouver Municipal and Regional Employees Union (VMREU) has 3,000 members working for the City of Vancouver, the Police Commission, the Parks and School Boards, Colleges and Regional District offices. The present organization bears little resemblance to its parent, the Vancouver City Hall Employees Association, which was founded in 1918.

The reason for the Association's establishment began some four years earlier in 1914, at the beginning of the First World War. City Council decided that civic employees should make some "contribution" to the war effort: it was decided that all staff would have their salaries reduced by 20 percent. The "contributors" learned of their generosity the following morning in newspaper.

The inside workers at the City Hall began meeting, more or less regularly, to find a way to retrieve their lost pay. In 1917, it was decided that a petition, signed by all members of the staff, be presented to Council insisting that wages be restored to the 1914 levels. The document was called a "round robin letter" and was partially successful. Council decided to increase salaries by 10 percent of the NEW rate. Thus a person earning \$100 in 1914, received \$88 in 1917 -- after the 10 percent salary increase.

The "round robin" was important because it was the first attempt at united action by the inside employees. Its partial success and the insult of the "repayment" was the final push needed toward unionization. The Vancouver City Hall Employees Association was formed in July 1918, and affiliated with the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada in August of that year. F.D. Corrin was its first President.

The next few years were turbulent. Many

members felt the whole purpose of the organization was to retrieve their 1914 salary levels, but were unclear as to what action to take. Non-member employees were contemptuous. Council was hostile. Finally, in 1919, the threat of strike action forced Council to restore salaries to the 1914 scales.

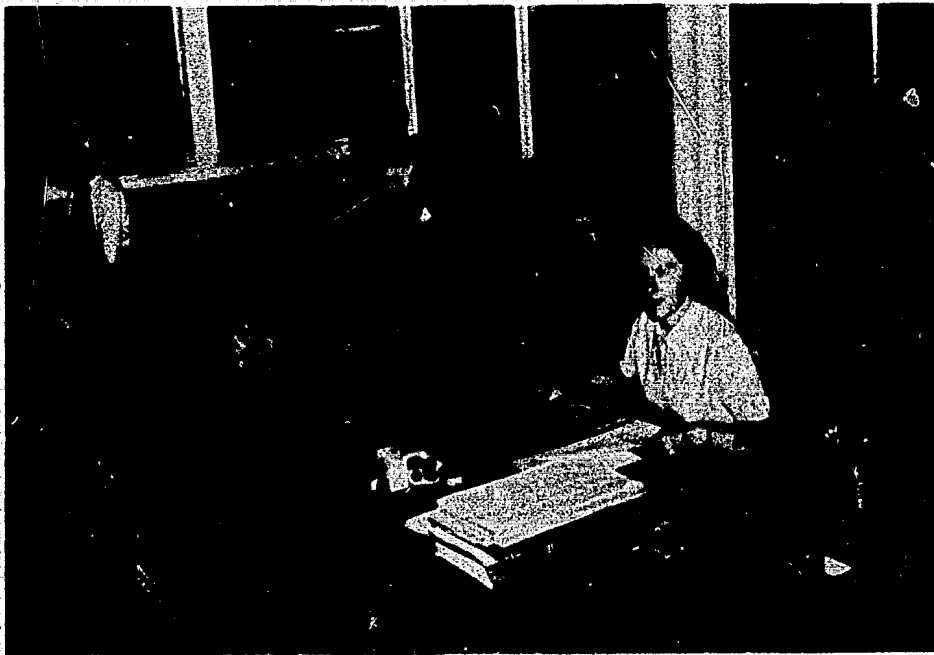
Having achieved their objective, certain members put forward a motion for disbandment. Others felt that this was only the beginning, since there were many other areas that would benefit from unified efforts. Gradually a course of action for

*Vancouver Fire Department. Courtesy VPL.*



*Labour History Spring 1979/10*





*Courtesy B.C. Government Employees Union.*

the association was agreed upon by the membership, and the existence of the Vancouver City Hall Employees Association was secured.

The Association joined with the Policemen's Union, the Vancouver Firefighters, and the Outside Workers to form the Civic Federation. By 1920 the Federation became the major bargaining agent for the municipal workers. One of its first accomplishments was the formation of a Conciliation Board consisting of four aldermen and four union members to assist in labour disputes. By 1927, the Federation had an agreement with the City for its first pension plan. This became the Provincial Superannuation Plan for all provincial government employees in 1928.

In spite of more or less stabilized bargaining, the Association was in grave danger in the early years of the Great Depression. Once again Council endeavoured to reduce the amount of money spent on wages--not by reducing salaries, but by laying off its employees. The Association came to agreement that all employees would continue to be employed, but they would work every other week with their wages cut back accordingly. It was not the best solution for all concerned, but it did manage to keep Association members off of the welfare rolls.

There is an interesting sidelight to the story of the City Hall Inside Workers in its relations with women co-workers. Although women had been asked to become members of the Association they had refused, preferring to form their own Women's Auxiliary. The all-male membership repeatedly pointed out the advantages of full membership, but were firmly rejected by the women until 1944. One woman, Minnie Lazarus, convinced the men were right, talked the women into joining the Association. Miss Lazarus became the only woman executive member from that year until her retirement 23 years later. She stepped down for the author, who later became the Association's first woman president.

The Association became the Vancouver Municipal and Regional Employees Union in 1970 when the executive reassessed its role in the trade union movement. The membership remained adamant about maintaining the union's independent status, but agreed with the Executive that the Provincial Government take-over of many City departments was having a disturbing effect on the membership. It was agreed that the Association must be ready to expand in other areas that needed organizing. The Vancouver Municipal and Regional Employees Union has never looked back since.●

# To Cross the Rubicon°

The Struggle for Collective Bargaining Rights in the Government Service  
conleen postwick

Workers employed by the Government of British Columbia began to organize for the same basic reasons as workers employed in the private sector: they wanted to negotiate their wages and conditions of work. As with all workers, government employees found that the real struggle was not in organizing themselves, but in securing recognition from the employer. The major difference, in fact, between public and private sector employment is not in the kind of work done, or in the kind of person employed, but in the nature of the employer.

Recognition is secured when the employer sits down with the employees' representative and works out a mutually satisfactory agreement regarding how much workers will work for, and under what conditions (this is called collective bargaining). Recognition is not merely acknowledging that an employees' organization exists: that is only seeing the obvious. Acknowledgement was given to organized government employees in 1919. Recognition, not until 55 years later, in 1974. Throughout a half century government employees pursued this objective in spite of their employers' intransigence, its often unethical use of its role as Government, and the implementation of unfair laws devised to keep collective bargaining out of the public service.

\* \* \*

Government employees in B.C. first joined together as a group in 1919. On January 10th of that year, 250 civil servants (as they were then called) met in Victoria to discuss the possibility of forming a province-wide association, and on February 8th, the Provincial Civil Service Association was founded. By their first Convention in July, it had a membership of 974 out of a total of 1,200 civil servants employed by the Government.



° To Cross the Rubicon is to take the irrevocable, decisive step; the boundary by passing which one becomes committed to an enterprise.



When government employees formed the P.C.S.A., they believed that a civil service which was well-organized, well-paid and content with their conditions of work could provide better services to the people, and provide them more efficiently. They felt they were involved in a partnership with their employer in meeting the public's needs and interests. Their jobs - as forest rangers, stenographers, statisticians, clerks, janitors, bookkeepers, ferry workers, etc. - were to carry out the decisions made by Government. The P.C.S.A. believed it was in everyone's interest to secure the conditions under which those services could be delivered efficiently.

The Government agreed that efficiency was crucial in meeting the needs of British Columbians. It, however, did not see itself in partnership with its employees, and felt the demands of this group of workers were more in conflict with the public interest than those of any other group in B.C. While in its role as Government, the employer enacted legislation establishing minimum wages, minimum hours of work, safer work conditions, and guidelines for union recognition and collective bargaining. Enforcement was more often than not left up to the employer -- but the law was made by Government, and it recognized that working people had certain rights, and employers certain responsibilities.

The Government, even though it hired, fired, paid wages to and acted as an employer towards government employees, exempted itself from the same responsibilities it had established for other employers. In so doing, it also denied government workers the same basic rights it granted most other non-government workers, including those mentioned above. The employer was thus able to use (and abuse) its role as Government to give it an unfair advantage over the workers it employed.

1919 was the first time government employees expressed a consciousness of themselves as a group of people with common interests - and with interests in common with other workers. The PCSA was founded on the principle of equality for all government workers, and modelled itself along industrial, rather than craft lines. Its stated objectives were promotion and salary increases based on merit and seniority; equal pay for equal work for women; a pension plan with an automatic cost of living

adjustment; a cost of living increase equal among all government employees (with a distinction based on need only); a minimum wage for all government employees; paid overtime; and an eight hour day. (1)

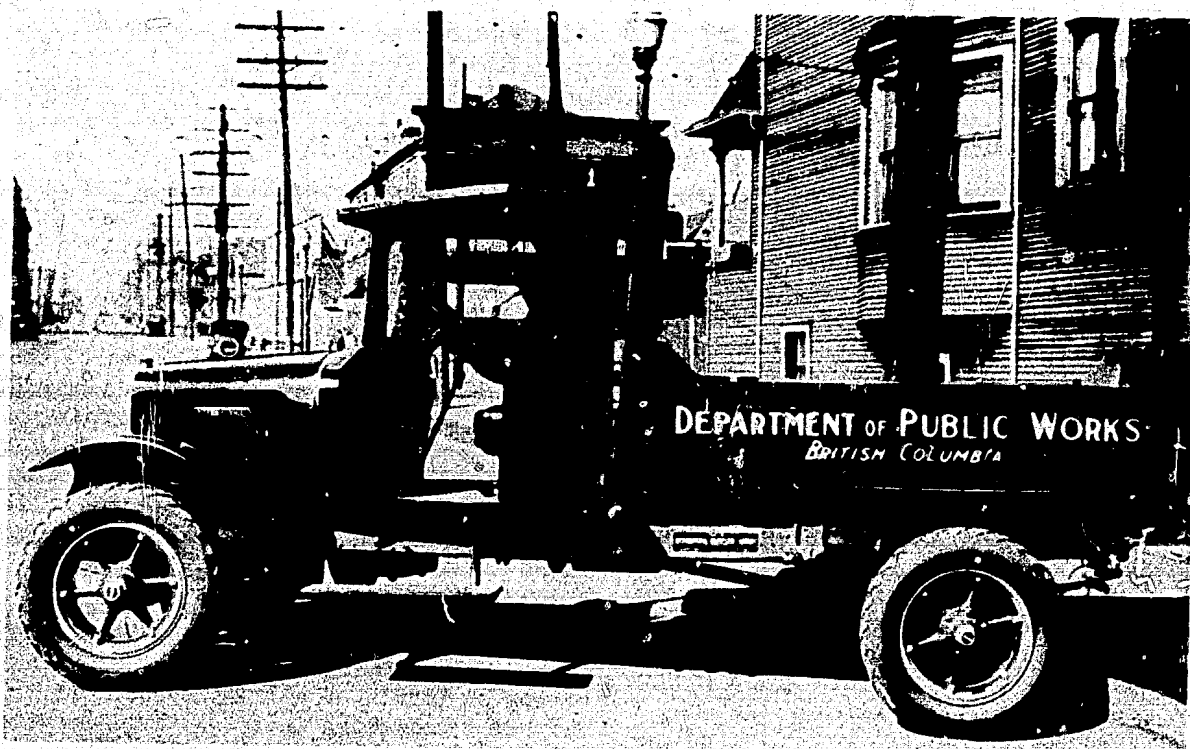
To take these proposals to its employer, the PCSA recognized the need for some just procedure, for a structure in which negotiation or discussion could take place. By 1919, the Government had appointed a Civil Service Commissioner whose responsibility it was "to secure better service at less cost." But, government workers had no real influence on him, and he was not empowered to make decisions -- only to listen to complaints (or grievances) put to him by employees. The employer was in no way obligated to implement recommendations he might make.

The P.C.S.A., therefore, suggested a committee be established to represent both employer and employees, with the P.C.S.A. acting on behalf of all employees. It further recommended that the Civil Service Act (which established the rules and regulations for civil servants) be amended so that it would form the basis of a contract between themselves and their employer.

The Government was not unwilling to receive suggestions from its employees, but it was under no obligation to consider them. It chose not to consider the PCSA proposals for an established procedure and amendments to the Civil Service Act. To do so would have required two things: 1) recognition that all government employees would be represented in any discussion relating to their wages and conditions of work; and 2) a willingness of the employer to be equally bound in a contract with its employees.

### Sympathy for the Blessed

At the 1919 Founding Convention of the PCSA Mr. W.H. MacInnis, the Civil Service Commissioner, spoke to the delegates on behalf of the Government. In his opening remark he stated what was, and what would remain the employer's position for years to come. "Blessed are they who expect little," he quoted, "for they shan't be disappointed." He continued to say he would be pleased to meet with the PCSA "in an informal, heart to heart way," but that the Government would not amend the Civil



*Truck used by employees in the Dept. of Public Works, 1928.  
Courtesy of Vancouver Public Library.*

Service Act to provide for a joint committee. The Government was anxious, he said, to give "sympathetic attention" to grievances, but complaints about wage disparities were "difficult always to be patient with." Asking for an equal cost of living bonus for all, the Commissioner chided, reflected a "spirit of envying what the other fellow got. This spirit is not very commendable," he said, "because it would not help anybody to have another person's bonus cut down." Mr. MacInnis made it clear that the Government supported the PCSA's principles. BUT: "It is when we get down to the actual working out of these principles that we are up against the wall." (2) It was this problem, "the actual working out," that became the struggle of government employees to obtain collective bargaining rights over the next five decades.

In March 1930, the Government amended the Civil Service Act to empower it to set workers' wages without seeking approval from the entire Legislature. (This allowed it to act more independently of "Government" in its role as employer.) Eighteen months later, government employees received a circular requesting them to state whether or not they were willing to accept wage re-

ductions of one day's pay per month until March 1932. "The contribution is to help the Government out in its present financial stringency."

During the late 1920's and the 1930's government employees were not active in a provincial body, but some groups kept up social activities, and submitted proposals from time to time to their employer. Wages were below the minimum rates set for other workers, and the (very) occasional "bonus" could not replace the need for real wage increases.

In March 1930, the Government amended the Civil Service Act to empower it to set workers' wages without seeking approval from the entire Legislature. (This allowed it to act more independently of "Government" in its role as employer.) Eighteen months later, government employees received a circular requesting them to state whether or not they were willing to accept wage reductions of one day's pay per month until March 1932. "The contribution is to help the Government out of its present financial stringency."

Employees declined, on the whole, but salary reductions were implemented anyway:

*Labour History Spring 1979/ 14*



in October 1931, 1500 of the 1765 government workers saw their wages cut from 2% to 10%. Five months later, higher paid civil servants who had escaped cutbacks were granted increases. In June salaries were cut again. And that same year it was revealed that the provincial government had grossly misspent funds allocated for the relief camps which housed the growing number of unemployed.

Government employees saw not only their wages reduced, but their numbers cut back, as their employer, attempting to save more money, instituted lay offs and time reductions almost as a matter of policy. While organized workers felt the weight of the Depression, unions were able to offer minimal security to their members. Government employees were not organized, however, and could do nothing to protect their jobs and wages.

\* \* \*

By 1941, two years after Canada had entered World War II, unions had begun to win substantial improvements in wages and conditions for their members -- improvements which were felt in many non-union jobs as well. But, most of the benefits of an improved economy and a strengthened trade unionism had passed the unorganized government employees by. Their wages remained at Depression-era levels, and inflation was piling these low wages down further. The 1919 proposals for a joint employer-employee committee, though supported by its own Deputy Ministers by 1937, had been swept under the rug by the Government. There was still no effective method

for employees to influence their wages and conditions. Yet the Civil Service was held up the Government as the ideal career opportunity for young people who wanted to "serve the public."

By the fall of 1941, two groups of provincial government employees -- one at the Vancouver Court House, the other at the Mental Hospital in Essondale -- organized themselves into two associations, unbeknownst to one another. In November, the Vancouver Court House Civil Service Employees' Association petitioned its employer for a cost of living increase. The Government responded in April 1942 by granting a \$10 monthly bonus to heads of households only, excluding all single employees, though the cost of living had gone up equally for everyone. This discriminatory handiwork, plus the action of a young Court House worker, was the added fuel needed to bring government employees together once again in a provincial organization.

The young Court House worker was 26 year old John Duncan. He had started working at the Vancouver Court House in 1928 at the age of thirteen. His starting wage had been \$65 per month, and in thirteen years his wage increases had averaged out to \$2 per year. With the help of the newly formed Association Executive (of which he was a member) Duncan wrote a letter of resignation to the Premier and the Attorney General, with a copy to the Vancouver Province. Excerpts, re-printed in the paper on April 22nd, bitterly expressed the resentment and frustration common throughout the Government workforce.

Duncan's letter provoked sufficient controversy that the Government ordered an investigation of the pay structure for its





## HITS CIVIL SERVICE

### 'Wasted Thirteen Best Years'

April 22nd, 1942.

A protest that the policy of the government denies advancement to youth in the provincial civil service was expressed by John Duncan in letters to the Premier and the attorney-general announcing his resignation, effective May 31, from the court registry staff of Vancouver Courthouse.

Mr. Duncan was 13 years old when he joined the service as a junior clerk 13 years ago at a salary of \$65 a month. He pointed out that he leaves with the same ranking, as when he joined, although he has held a number of responsible positions in his office.

His financial advancement has been at the rate of \$1 a year.

he stated, and at this rate he would have to continue another 27 years before he received the maximum.

#### CAN DO NOTHING.

The conditions, according to the writer, preclude young men in the service from marrying, and he says he was told that nothing could be done and he would have to consult the local politicians to obtain an increase in salary.

This state of affairs, he claims, fills clean-minded, decent living persons with disgust and contempt for government policy. In conclusion, he stated that he was leaving the service after wasting 13 of the best years of his life.

employees. Encouraged by this, the two groups from Vancouver and Essondale joined together to press for an immediate cost of living bonus for all employees. Their demand was partially met, and single employees were granted a \$5 monthly bonus.

In the next few years public employees at every level were beginning to organize to improve and protect wages and conditions: in November 1942 federal, provincial and municipal employees came together in a Joint Council of Public Employees, representing some 20,000 workers in B.C.

Meanwhile, a small number of provincial government employees were spending their holidays and weekends organizing branches of co-workers throughout B.C. A number of these branches affiliated to the Joint Council, but it wasn't until 1943 that they came together in an independent, province-wide organization of provincial government employees. In 1944 the British Columbia Government Employees Association held its Founding Convention. In 1945 it affiliated to the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada.

The B.C. Government Employees Association (B.C.G.E.A.) was a much stronger organization than its 1919 predecessor: there was a much clearer understanding among members of who they were and why they were joined together. Without this understanding, government employees could not have survived the next two or three decades as an organized group of workers: for, although they had

succeeded in coming together in a single body, their struggles were really just beginning.

### No Bargain is a Lousy Bargain

*"We wish to state at the outset that in our opinion no sharp division can be made between one type of employer and another where labour relations are concerned."*

Donald MacDonald, Sec'y-Treasurer  
Canadian Labour Congress, 1958  
CLC Brief to the Carrothers' Inquiry

The BCGEA spent much of its energy during the first years making "representations" to the Government on behalf of its members. The 1944 Founding Convention had directed the Executive to take a number of proposals to the employer: paid overtime, holiday leave; promotions based on merit and seniority; wage increases; retirement provisions -- AND a collective bargaining procedure. Over the years these representations came to resemble a game of "Mother May I?" in the absence of a recognized method of presentation and negotiation: year after year the BCGEA would politely submit its proposals; and year after year the Government would agree, deny, go part way -- or simply ignore the proposals (and the BCGEA) altogether. But, the point was made: government workers were to be subject to the whims and fancies of their employer. They were, as Maxime Leroy had said in 1909, "special citizens with no other right than that of obedience."

In 1947 the B.C. Government passed the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act (I.C.A. Act), which established a regulated procedure for solving disputes between union and management. The Act was an attempt to avoid (or end) a strike or lock-out during contract negotiations, or over contract interpretation. The Act covered all workers and employers in B.C. who negotiated and settled a contract covering the conditions of employment. All public employees were covered by the Act except those working for the provincial government. The Government had exempted itself and its own employees to protect its position as an employer: there must be negotiations before negotiations can break down; and there must be a contract before a dispute can arise



over interpretation. Government employees had neither, and the Government employer wanted it kept that way.

Finally, in 1951, the Government agreed to set up a committee to investigate and recommend improvements to the ICA Act. The Ash Committee, as it was called, submitted its report in February 1952: the five members had unanimously supported extending the Act to cover all Government employees. The Government stalled, and said it needed six months to study the "principle" involved, even though the principle had already been established by law for all other workers.

The Government changed hands after the election in June 1952. W.A.C. Bennett led the Social Credit Party to victory on a campaign promise of "economy and efficiency." The Ash Committee's recommendations were now in the hands of a new employer, but it was soon apparent that no action was being contemplated. A BCGEA offer to participate in a study of the principle of collective bargaining was ignored.

Over a year after the Ash Committee report, and after communications with the Government went continually unacknowledged, the BCGEA launched a publicity campaign in an effort to mobilize public opinion in support of the right to collective bargaining and arbitration. In advertisements published in the major newspapers across the province, the BCGEA appealed to "the highest authority, the People." It urged the public to demand that the Government extend the same basic civil right to its own employees that it had to all other workers in B.C. The exclusion of government employees from the ICA Act had become a question of discrimination; the struggle, one of obtaining civil liberties. Editorials appeared shortly after, supporting the BCGEA and calling the Government refusal to adopt the Ash Committee recommendations everything from "silly" (the Vancouver Sun) to a "suggestion of Fascism... (and) a disregard for the democratic principle" (the Ladysmith Chronicle). But, the Government bounced back, refusing to budge: the Act could not be amended because "The Crown Can't Be Bound." (3)

The Government's message, however, to the 1953 BCGEA Convention was encouraging. "We must work as a team," said the new employer. Despite the fact that in just one year the Government had eliminated 601

workers from the Government workforce, the delegates took heart: they were promised an end to political patronage, fair wages, and "open and fair discussion" with the employer. The Convention, "so imbued with the spirit of friendliness and good will... decided it was a pure waste of time to even discuss resolutions critical of their employer." (4)

The enthusiasm was short-lived. Each year the Executive came back to the members to report "no progress," "no reply," "no action taken as yet." Convention delegates urged the Executive to take stronger

### A Woman's Place

"A Woman's Place" was a column in the *Provincial* (BCGEA journal) written by Madeline Johnson. Below is an excerpt from the Spring issue of 1949.

If 82% of the women who work do so because they have to, to maintain themselves or children or other dependents, then their pay should be equal to that of men for the same work. They have no magic formula which permits them to buy food at a cheaper rate, or a password that enables them to get a cheaper rent. Their obligations are the same as those of a married man. In a world greatly depleted of men, through two wars brought about by men, great numbers of women face a future of self-support and are not intimidated by the thought, but would like a square deal. In wartime, the services of women are much in demand in every field, but, having successfully completed their missions, they are expected to retire from the industrial and business world into the home. But what home -- and where?

\*\*\*

The first grievance taken to the Civil Service Commission by the BCGEA was in 1947 and was based on equal pay for equal work. The grievance was won, but it wasn't until 1973 that the Government agreed to work with the Union to eliminate sex discrimination in pay, hiring and promotion.



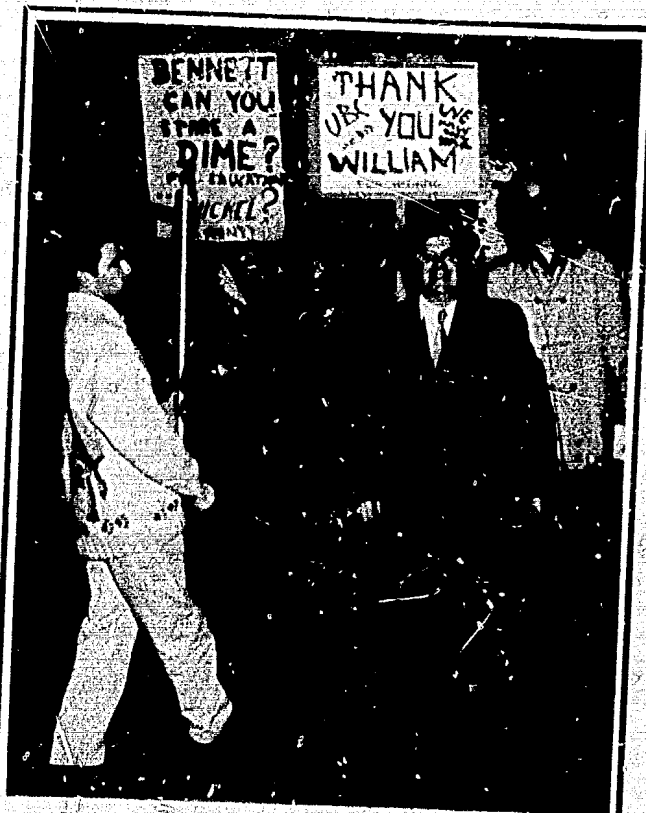
actions on their behalf. Resolutions were submitted and passed: collective bargaining; wage increases; paid overtime; five-day, 40-hour week; proper grievance procedure; standardized pension plan; twice monthly pay.

Between 1953 and 1957 there were no general wage increases for government employees. The BCGEA was told it was regarded as "only another pressure group." When asked the reason for the Government's total lack of communication, the BCGEA was told: "if you hear nothing, the answer is 'no.' If the answer is 'yes' you will read the announcement in the press."

In December 1956 the BCGEA submitted a brief to the Government in which they presented six major demands expressed by the members. Included among these were a collective bargaining procedure, wage increases and a 40-hour week for all employees. No answer from the Government. No press announcements. "Nothing but silence."

During the early and mid-1950's the government workforce was not expanding at a tremendous rate, but turnover was surprisingly high (indicating great dissatisfaction among employees). From 17.09% annually in 1949, the turnover rate had increased to nearly 36% in 1956. (4) The natural growth of the government workforce (due to public demand for increased services) coupled with an annual turnover rate of over one in three, brought workers into the BCGEA who came from industries which had long ago established a collective bargaining procedure. Government workers, most with a wider experience than previous generations, felt the employer's obstinance was more than simply unreasonable: it was hostile provocation. The resolutions which each year were passed by the Convention meant nothing unless and until this group of workers obtained a collective bargaining procedure and a negotiated contract.

In May 1957 a series of mass rallies were held by government workers, demanding their employer take positive action in response to the proposals in the BCGEA brief. They further demanded that the BCGEA conduct a strike vote of all members if the Government still refused to move. The members isolated three issues over which they were prepared to strike: 1) establishment of a collective bargaining procedure and an impartial Board of Arbitration; 2) a 13% wage increase retroactive to April



W.A.C. Bennett, U.B.C. Campus, 1956.  
Courtesy of Vancouver Public Library.

1, 1957; 3) a maximum five day, 40-hour week for all employees, and paid overtime.

The BCGEA Executive tried to avoid a strike. After advising the employer as to the prevailing sentiment among the membership, the Government agreed to a meeting. The BCGEA put forward its strike demands. The Government's response was unacceptable. It would grant only a 6% wage increase. The 40-hour week would be implemented "as soon as possible," but it was "not prepared" to state how many hours would have to be worked before employees were paid overtime. The response to collective bargaining was so vague, that the BCGEA suggested a letter be sent outlining the Government position. They were told it was not the Government's "policy" to write letters to organizations, and therefore no letter would be forthcoming. (5)

The strike ballots were issued! By the end of June over 9,600 of the 10,000 members had cast their vote, with 89.2% in favour of strike action.

No word from the Government.

The strike deadline set for July 12th.



The Government wired the BCGEA: a meeting could take place on July 10th to once again discuss the strike demands.

*Provincial*  
AUGUST, 1957

## Story of The Strike Settlement

### Ten Days That Shook The Province

Headline in the *Provincial*, August 1957, announcing terms of strike settlement.

The strike was averted. The demands were partially met: wage increases were set at 7.5%, retroactive to July 1, 1957 (not implemented until after 1 Apr., 1958); a 40-hour work week and paid overtime above the maximum (not fully implemented by July 1958); the question of collective bargaining and arbitration would be given over to an impartial, one-person Board of Reference whose proposals would be placed before the Legislature with a Government recommendation for adoption. The Board's report would be forwarded to the BCGEA upon completion (hearings began one year later - the report was suppressed until 1973).

The Board of Reference began its hearings on 11 July 1958, with A.W.R. Carrothers, a UBC Law Professor, conducting the study. (6) BCGEA members were angry that the Government had taken so long to act on its commitment regarding the investigation. The retroactive 7.5% pay increase had been implemented so late that it overlapped with the 1958 wage demands for a 10% increase. When the 7.5% had been implemented, it still left government employees from 11% to 18% behind federal employees and industrial wage earners.

The 1958 Convention directed the Executive to take militant action if necessary to move the Government to honour its commitments. During that year various branches were demanding a strike vote be taken of the membership in light of the Government's continual delay. Government employees were determined to win satisfactory wage increases and collective bargaining, and every stall by the employer only served to strengthen their resolve. The employer was not legally

bound to its commitments - and the members knew their employer.

Carrothers submitted his report to the Government in January 1959. He described the BCGEA as an industrial type union, half of whose 11,200 members came under the Civil Service Act, the balance being employed "through other appointing agencies" (i.e., Liquor Control Board, Crown Corporations, etc.). Carrothers outlined, point by point, how the BCGEA's proposals could be met, either by amendments to the existing Civil Service Act, or by the adoption of a Public Service Act, which could easily meet all BCGEA demands pertaining to collective bargaining, arbitration, and a binding contract. Carrothers stated that "...the objectives of the British Columbia Government Employees' Association basically are all attainable within (the) constitutional framework." (7)

Carrothers' recommendations were, briefly, that 1) collective bargaining be made to apply to government employees; 2) in the event of a dispute, the method of settlement be binding arbitration; 3) senior civil servants be excluded from the definition of government employee; 4) no limitation be placed on the freedom of association, and freedom to affiliate with other labour organizations; and 5) a proper grievance procedure be established.

The Government, after it had received and reviewed the recommendations, decided to renege on its commitment to the BCGEA and immediately suppressed the report. It wasn't until the end of February that the BCGEA even knew the report had been submitted. No one, except the employer, knew what the report contained, and nobody would find out until many years later. At the same time, employees learned that the Government had budgeted for a wage increase which would have put them behind the average industrial wage prevailing in 1957.

During late February government employees held protest rallies throughout the province demanding the release of the Carrothers Report and higher wages. The BCGEA issued strike ballots to the membership, and they were returned with 82% in favour of striking. The Government decided to double the wage offer, meeting one of the major demands of the Association. The members called for the release of the report. The Government refused. The BCGEA called a strike deadline for 7 A.M., March 13th, 1959.





*Phil Gaglardi and B.C.G.E.A. member on the picket line, March 13, 1959.  
Courtesy of the B.C. Government Employees Union.*

This was the first time "civil servants" had taken strike action in the history of Canada. (8) It was not illegal -- there was no law which forbade strikes among public employees. Nonetheless, the Government, which had always been slow in reacting to government employees before, now moved with the speed of lightning. By 11 A.M. on March 13th, government employees had been served an ex parte injunction, forbidding them to picket government buildings -- four hours after the pickets had been set up. The Government had obtained the injunction from the B.C. Supreme Court the night before the strike began. By March 16th they had introduced legislation to ban any further picketing of government buildings.

The BCGEA called the strike off, but considered it a partial victory: they did not get the Carrothers Report released, but

they got a 7.5% average wage increase. And that was all they got on the plus side of the ledger.

The Government, represented by Phil Gaglardi, Minister of Highways, publicly accused the leadership of the BCGEA of being "power-hungry, arrogant leaders" who were using "the hard-working, honest, sincere civil servants in a game...(to) take over the elected representatives of the Government of the Province of British Columbia." Gaglardi, referring to the four hours that government employees had walked off the job, went on at great length to describe the suffering endured in hospitals, prisons and mental institutions throughout the province because of the irresponsibility of the BCGEA. (The BCGEA had ensured all essential services would be maintained.) But, he added, "only by the courageous action of



the Government were lives saved and order restored." He re-iterated the Government's position in regard to collective bargaining, stating that "union status" was something "which no Government in a free country can give." This was the employer who had reviewed and suppressed the Carrothers Report. (9)

### Whatever happened to the Carrothers Report?



"Our labor relations expert just proposed a fair, equitable labor policy. Fire him immediately!"

—Steel Labour

Government employees were united in their struggle to obtain collective bargaining rights. Both in 1957 and again in 1959, they had received the support of organized labour. This had given them a sense of confidence, and a stronger feeling of association and solidarity with other workers. But, these were not enough to win collective bargaining rights from their employer: without a strong leadership in their own organization, the unity that was needed could not be mobilized.

The BCGEA Executive drew back sharply after the 1959 strike and did not provide the necessary leadership to win this forty year old struggle. Because the leadership

was weak, the Government was able to take steps which can only be interpreted as an attempt to weaken the BCGEA even further, or even to destroy the organization altogether. In 1960 the employer revoked the checkoff system of collecting membership dues, which government employees had enjoyed since 1947, two years after affiliating to the Trades and Labour Congress. The reason, the Government said, for discontinuing checkoff was the fact that the BCGEA was affiliated to the B.C. Federation of Labour -- and that this was an indirect affiliation to a political party, the CCF (forerunner to the New Democratic Party).\*

"The Government believes...that it would be derelict in its duty if it continued to provide any service which might contribute to or imply approval of such an affiliation." (10) The BCGEA heard of the decision through the press, and only later received a telegram from the Government confirming press reports. Though other unions of public employees were also affiliated to the BCFL, the BCGEA was the only one to lose checkoff privileges.

Because of the reason given for the cancelled checkoff privileges, government employees were naturally led to believe that if they withdrew from the BCFL, the system would be restored. Members of the BCGEA voted to withdraw from the BCFL, but checkoff was not restored until seven years later (1967) after the Government announced that the BCGEA was again "responsible" enough to enjoy such privileges.

The BCGEA survived the cancelled checkoff by organizing volunteers to collect dues from the membership for those seven years. This was an inefficient method, and membership fluctuated during the period. By 1966 morale was at an all time low: government employees were discouraged by the "father knows best", saccharine paternalism of their employer; by low wages that lagged anywhere from 10% to 24% behind those in the private sector; by the poor working relationship between employer and employee generally; and by the lack of strong leadership in their own organization.

But determination hadn't died out in the

\*The BCGEA was a founding member of the B.C. Federation of Labour, established in 1957, a fact that did not cause the Government concern until 1959.



BCGEA. These government employees, unlike those who went before them in 1919, or even 1941, had a long history behind them of determined effort. Taking away checkoff did not take away the desire for an organization. The fact that most BCGEA members remained members during this period is evidence that, as individuals, they recognized the need for an organization to protect existing rights and benefits. "The action of this large majority... is an act of faith which reveals, as few things can, the depth of their belief in the need to stay organized..." (11)

Nor did the Government's heavy-handedness and obsessive refusal to grant the BCGEA meaningful recognition cause government employees to put away their struggle for collective bargaining rights. In 1968 800 ferry workers went out on strike for twelve days, winning a "diluted brand of collective bargaining" and wage parity with non-government workers doing similar jobs. (12) The following year, delegates to the BCGEA Convention changed their Association to a Union. They authorized an increase in membership dues and the hiring of new staff to handle the union's business, and they elected an Executive which would lead them in renewed demands for collective bargaining rights and full recognition of their union.

In 1971 the new Executive of the B.C. Government Employees Union took legal action against the Government, charging it with violation of the Civil Service Act in its refusal to discuss collective bargaining. The judge ruled the Government was acting legally, but said the Civil Service Commission did have an obligation to meet and discuss all such matters with the BCGEU. This was an official recognition of the BCGEU as the representative of the government employees, and by 1972 it had entered into discussions with the Civil Service Commission regarding collective bargaining.

In early 1972 the Government introduced an amendment to the Public Schools Act (Bill 3) which would enable the Cabinet to set limits on teachers' salary increases in order, it said, to control and reduce inflation. The wage ceiling for 1972 was set at 6.5%. The amendment would force teachers to seek taxpayer approval (through referendum) for any increase above 6.5%. This placed serious limitations, not only on salaries, but, more to the point, on teachers' rights to collective bargaining:

## THE ARROGANCE OF POWER!

The Provincial Government's proposed Bill 3 creates 2nd Class Citizens out of civil servants, teachers, hospital workers, and all public employees, by denying them the fundamental right to negotiate their wages and working conditions. It is a deliberate attack on the principle of collective bargaining, and every working person in this province needs to be concerned.

### WHO'S NEXT?

If this vicious Bill is passed, our whole democratic structure is threatened and every sector of our society will feel the lash of a demagogic government bent on suppressing the rights of the individual.

The Bennett government has so lost touch with its mandate that it is prepared to legislate the rights of over 65,000 British Columbians out of existence. Who's next? A further 200,000 British Columbians are in jeopardy if the government persists with its present policy. Bill 3 could be just the beginning.

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Fight back, join the protest... attend one of the mass rallies sponsored by THE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING DEFENCE COMMITTEE at centres throughout the province this week.

IN VANCOUVER:

THURSDAY, MARCH 9th - EXHIBITION GARDENS 8 PM

THE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING  
DEFENCE COMMITTEE  
representing

B.C. Teachers' Federation — Canadian Union of Public  
Employees — B.C. Government Employees Union — Hospital  
Employees Union — Psychiatric Nurses' Association of B.C.  
— The College Faculty Federation of B.C.

Ad placed in the Vancouver Province,  
March 8, 1972.

they would no longer be able to negotiate wage increases with their employer. Though Bill 3 was directed at teachers, the Government made it clear that the 6.5% ceiling would be applied to its own employees as well.

Bill 3 affected, not only teachers as public employees, but hospital, school board, municipal and provincial government employees as well. All public employees were in danger of losing collective bargaining rights they either had, or were on the verge of winning. In March 1972, six unions, representing 65,000 public employees, joined together in the "Collective Bargaining Defence Committee" to protest the legislation and support teachers in their fight against the erosion of their



collective bargaining rights. Among them was the BCGEU: breaking a long-standing tradition (and Constitutional by-law) of remaining completely non-political, its members participated in protest rallies which helped bring the Government down in the next election.

The election, held in August, 1972, installed a new employer in the Parliament Buildings in Victoria. The New Democratic Party had gained wide support among public employees, unhappy with the previous government. The BCGEU greeted the change with enthusiasm and eagerly entered into negotiations with the Government. In 1973 legislation was drawn up which would establish collective bargaining rights for government employees, and in 1974 the BCGEU signed its first contract on behalf of its members. Government employees were now an organized and recognized group of workers.

\* \* \*

The BCGEU is today the largest union in British Columbia, with some 43,000 members. In 1973, it re-joined the "house of labour" -- the attempts of the employer to keep government employees a separated and disadvan-

tagged group in the workforce were not as strong as the common objectives and struggles which unite working people across "public" and "private" domains. These objectives, and the manner in which government employees sought to obtain them, have brought public and private sector workers together. Shared experience has helped to eliminate many of the false distinctions imposed upon them.

The strength of the B.C. Government Employees Union today doesn't come only from its size and its affiliation to Labour. A union is both a reflection of the struggles which have built it, and a "storage house" of the collective experience of its members, past and present. One voice, winding its way through history, tells us something of the BCGEU's past, gives reason for its future, and explains the necessity of its present. From one member in 1947: "Realizing the results obtained so far, it must be apparent to the fair-minded that facts have revealed an imperative future need: the continuance of our Association... Our conditions before organization must never be forgotten, because, except for the determination engendered by our memory, we have no guarantee, written, implied or otherwise, that those conditions will not return, to our everlasting detriment." (13)



Security Matron, Switchboard, Oakalla Prison.  
Courtesy of the B.C. Government Employees Union.



#### FOOTNOTES

1. Provincial Civil Service Association of B.C., *Report of the Proceedings of the First Annual Convention*, Vancouver, B.C., 26 July 1919.
2. W.H. MacInnis, Civil Service Commissioner, "Address to the Convention," in *ibid.*
3. "Arbitration, The Story of Your Civil Right," *Special Press Release (B.C.G.E.A.)* April 1953.
4. Black, Wesley D., "Convention Address," *Minutes, B.C.G.E.A. 10th Annual Convention*, 30 October 1953. See also, "Editorial," *The Provincial*, October 1954.
5. "The Cabinet Meeting, June 21, 1957," *The Provincial*, July 1957. The Government offered to re-establish the "Cabinet-Association Committee" in lieu of Arbitration procedures. This Committee had originally been set up in 1949, but after five years and fewer meetings, was dismantled in 1954 by the Government. The Committee was modelled after the Whitley Councils of Britain.
6. Chief Justice Gordon Sloan was the original appointee, but resigned after he was given an additional post in the Forestry Department. A.W.R. Carrothers was appointed in his place by the Government who, after the Report had been submitted, claimed they did not have any confidence in Carrothers' abilities.
7. Carrothers, A.W.R., *Report of a Board of Reference*, January 1959, p. 42.
8. "Editorial," *The Vancouver Province*, March 1959  
"Editorial," *The Toronto Star*, March 1959
9. These statements were made during a public debate between the Government, represented by Phil Gaglardi, Minister of Highways, and the B.C.G.E.A., represented by Alf C. Bennett, Assistant General Secretary, on the CBC "7 O'clock Show," 23 April 1959.
10. Black, Wesley D., Telegram to the B.C.G.E.A. dated 11 October 1960.
11. Leonard, William, Executive Secretary, Saskatchewan Civil Service Association, "The Check-off is a Modern Convenience," *The Provincial*, January 1961.
12. MacLean, Bruce, "British Columbia Government Employees Union," *Canadian Labour*, March 1973, p. 12.
13. \_\_\_\_\_, "History Reveals a Future Need," *The Provincial*, Summer 1947.

---

In 1958 employees of the Government of B.C. suffered 869 disabling work injuries. In other words, more than seven out of each hundred government employees were injured in the course of their employment in the year 1958. Seven employees were killed, 20 will be partially disabled for life, many more will bear the scars of their experience. Government employees suffer injury at a rate which is comparable to some hazardous industries.

That is a poor commentary on the zeal with which a safety program is being pursued. The initiative for the establishment of a sound safety program must be taken by management. We do not suggest that anyone representing our employer does anything other than support the idea of safety, but a much more active role is necessary. A passive policy has been known to produce fatal results.

From the *Provincial*, 1959.

---



# CUPE: Structured for Democracy

Betty Merrill

*Betty Merrill is a Vice-president of Local 561, Canadian Union of Public Employees (Coquitlam School Board). She is also President of the Metro Vancouver & District Council of C.U.P.E. and serves on a number of Education Committees for C.U.P.E., the New Westminster Labour Council, and the B.C. Federation of Labour. Mrs. Merrill works full time as a secretary in a Coquitlam elementary school.*

The Canadian Union of Public Employees has its roots in two separate organizations: the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE) and the Canadian Electrical Trade Union of Toronto (CETU).

The Canadian Electrical Trade Union was formed in 1921 to represent hydro, electric utility and transit workers in Toronto. By December 1944, CETU decided to set up the National Organization of Civic Utility and Electrical Workers within the framework of the Canadian Congress of Labour and received a charter from the CCL in 1945 as a national union. In 1952 the organization changed its name to the National Union of Public Service Employees (NUPSE). Civic, hospital and school board employees who sought to organize under the banner of the CCL joined NUPSE -- and the national union continued to grow.

The National Union of Public Employees (NUPE) began in 1949 when representatives from a number of public employee unions met to discuss the establishment of one national union which would bring all these workers together in a single body under the Trades and Labour Congress (TLC)\*. During the following year the idea found growing support from across Canada, and in 1952 NUPE was granted a charter from the TLC. This gave it the right to hold conventions and charge per capita tax, but it did not give NUPE the right to issue charters itself.

By 1954 the 18,000 member NUPE had gained wide acceptance and once again applied for a charter as a national union. In 1955,

the charter was granted by the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada.

From the beginning, the memberships of NUPE and NUPSE had one thing in common: they were public employees, a group which had been overlooked and abused for decades. The attitude of the general public was often like that of the master towards the servant. Public employees were treated with paternalism by their employers. The rights enjoyed by workers in the private sector were often denied public sector workers: they were prohibited from participating in politics (except to vote), and often felt reduced to catching the crumbs as they fell from the politicians' tables -- their employers' answer to demands for fair wages and collective bargaining rights. The members of the two unions had both been struggling to overcome their economic and social disadvantages, and their treatment as "second class citizens."

In 1963 delegates to the annual conventions of NUPE and NUPSE decided in their separate meetings to dissolve their respective unions and merge into one big union of public service employees. In September of that year, the strength and energy of two were united into one: the Canadian Union of Public Employees, with 77,000 members across Canada.

CUPE established aims and objectives in its early years which emphasize, not only the struggle to win rights and conditions, but also to protect and retain them once they are established. Some of these were and are:

- to establish bargaining rights where they do not exist;
- to win and retain the right to strike as (by definition) an integral part of bargaining rights;

*Labour History Spring 1979/25*

\*For a description of the T.L.C. and the C.C.L. see Labour History, Vol. 1; No. 3, Winter '77/78, "Major Labor Organizations in Canada," p. 37.



- to improve wages and working conditions;
- to win and retain job security and protection from the arbitrary actions of employers;
- to base hiring on merit and to win and retain recognition of seniority;
- to take part in the politics of Canada, federally, provincially and locally.

\* \* \*

You have been given an abbreviated history of how CUPE got started. Now, we will take a look at the structure of the union, and how it works.

#### LOCALS

Everything begins with the membership. Each certified group of employees is called a Local, which has an administrative body and committees which take care of all business at the local level. The Local is involved (with the help of the National Ser-

ving Representative) in all aspects of the collective bargaining process as it applies to its members. Usually the Local membership meets once a month, the elected officers and committees more frequently.

#### DISTRICT COUNCILS

Every province is divided into regions and areas, each with certain functions and responsibilities. The District Council is a co-ordinating body at the local level. Locals within an area are encouraged to affiliate (but it is not obligatory) and use the District Council to co-ordinate their collective bargaining actions, educational activities, and any plans to deal with issues (such as legislation) which adversely affect CUPE members. In this way the membership can come together in groups to discuss all matters which affect them as trade unionists and as working people.

#### PROVINCIAL DIVISIONS

At annual CUPE conventions in each



Vancouver City Garbage Collection, July 4, 1934.  
Courtesy Vancouver Public Library.



province (there are provincial conventions every year, and national conventions every two years) delegates elect an Executive Board, called the Provincial Division. These Divisions are co-ordinating bodies whose main function is to bring together CUPE Locals throughout the province, particularly in making representations to the Provincial Governments. The elected Board is responsible for the administration of union business between conventions, particularly in the field of legislative issues. Under the CUPE constitution, the power of the Provincial Division is limited to matters concerning their own province.

Both the District Councils and the Provincial Divisions are mainly advisory bodies to the union Locals. They have no constitutional power to enforce decisions, and their policies must not conflict with the national policies laid down by the National Convention. Affiliation by union Locals is voluntary. The independence of the Local is of the utmost importance in CUPE, subject only to the Constitution, which, in turn, is subject only to the decisions made by the membership at National Conventions.

#### BI-ENNIAL NATIONAL CONVENTIONS

The National Convention is the highest deliberative body of the union. It is where delegates meet to consider all resolutions on policy which are sent in by every Local in CUPE. The National Convention is the only body which can consider amendments to the union's Constitution. It is responsible for election of officers, and of the National Executive Board and the National Executive Committee. The Convention receives and considers financial statements, and makes changes to per capita tax upon consideration of these reports.

The National Executive Board is the governing body when the Convention is not in session. It has the job of carrying out the directions of the membership as expressed at the National Convention.

The National Executive Committee is the administrative body between Executive Board meetings. It consists of the President, who is responsible for exercising supervision over the affairs of CUPE; the Secretary-Treasurer, who is responsible for all the union's money; and five General Vice-Presidents.

Up to this point we have been talking about elected bodies. CUPE has a number of people with skills and expertise in paid positions as well. Earlier I mentioned the National Servicing Representatives: there are approximately 160 of these "reps" working out of Regional and/or Area offices across Canada. They are involved in servicing, organizing, and education of the membership.

#### NATIONAL DEPARTMENTS

There are a number of National Departments, set up at the time of the NUPE - NUPSE merger. These operate under the executive and administrative authority of the elected National Officers, enabling them to implement union policy. (For example, a CUPE Education Officer is able to implement the union's education policy through the Education Department.) These Departments and their functions are as follows:

*Organization Dept.* - co-ordinates and provides general supervision over the servicing and organizational activities of the Regions.

*Public Relations Dept.* - projects the union and its activities to the general public; and counsels the union about how its activities will affect its relations with the public.

*Research Dept.* - gathers information and material, from both inside and outside the union, to guide and assist Locals in collective bargaining.

*Education Dept.* - responsible for implementing the union's educational programs, carried out in conjunction with the Provincial Divisions and District Councils; works in close co-operation with the Education Departments of the Canadian Labour Congress, Provincial Federations, and Labour Councils.

*Legislative Dept.* - responsible for giving assistance in such matters as arbitration, contract wordings, preparation of briefs to government, and technical problems which can arise in a number of different areas.

*Job Evaluation Dept.* - helps Locals assess the worth of various job classifications.





Members of C.U.P.E. in the Circulation Dept., Vancouver Public Library. Courtesy VPL.

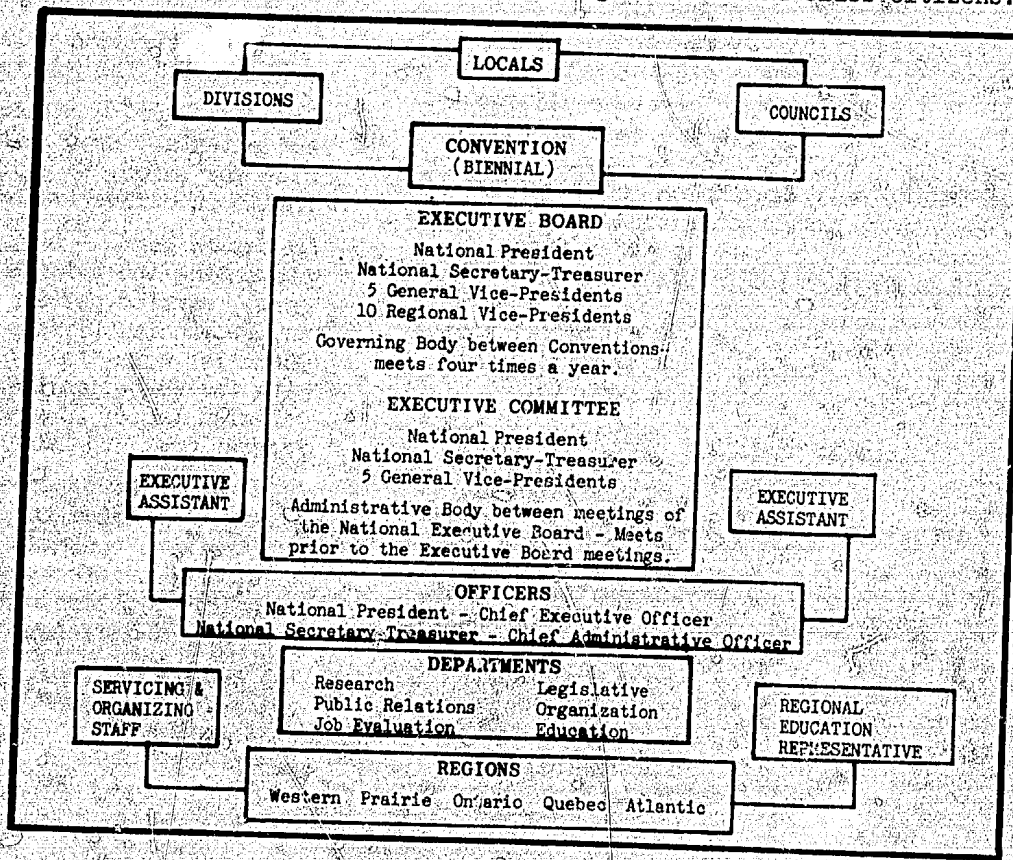
CUPE has had a "tougher row to hoe" than most modern trade unions. Like other unions of government and public employees, it has had to overcome many of the traditional and conservative attitudes towards public sector workers. Nonetheless, CUPE's growth has been rapid. CUPE is the largest union in Canada today, with 252,000 members who work in libraries, private hospitals, municipal governments, universities and colleges, public schools, medical service and school board offices -- to name just a few.

One reason for CUPE's continued growth is the personal involvement of the membership in the governing of their union. Often management will complain that it is forced to deal with union experts. The "experts" they are talking about are CUPE members who take an active role in their union after their regular day's work is done.

Why?

"Because," as one CUPE member put it, "it is the personal commitment of each of us to see that none of the hard fought for benefits are eroded and that working people wherever they may be, can provide a good life for their families. A commitment to never again be second class citizens." ●

C  
U  
P  
E





# A GREAT DEBATE

At the January 1945 Convention members of the three year old B.C. Government Employees Association instructed their Executive to hold a referendum on the question of affiliation to the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (one of the predecessors of the Canadian Labour Congress). To enable members to hear both sides of the question, the Executive was further instructed to appoint two committees representing the opposing viewpoints. These were called, simply, the Pro and Con Committees. Their reports were submitted to the Executive who, in turn, distributed them to the entire membership before a vote was taken.

BCGEA members were concerned with the affect affiliation would have on their organization: the Committees addressed themselves, therefore, to questions which expressed such concerns. These included the benefits and obligations of affiliation; the right to remain an autonomous organization; the effect on employer-employee relations; and on negotiations with the Government.

Printed below are excerpts from the reports, submitted in May 1945 by the Pro and Con Committees.

## Pro

The Trades and Labour Congress of Canada is the biggest and most important labour organization in Canada. In 1945 it represents over 376,000 workers. These include, in B.C., the B.C. Teachers Federation\*, the B.C. Library Association, and associations of municipal and civic employees.

The TLC exists for the purpose of promoting legislation in the interests of labour in Canada, and of advancing and safeguarding the social and economic standards of workers, by making representations to the proper governmental authority, and by rallying the full support of labour. TLC activities must, of necessity, involve negotiations with governmental bodies, but the TLC is firmly opposed to any connection with partisan politics. It has recently set up a national Political Action Committee for the purpose of more effectively carrying on its negotiation with governmental bodies, and of supporting those who are favourable to labour, regardless of their party.

Affiliation would entitle our Association to full representation in the Trades

\*B.C.T.F. was, in 1945, affiliated to organized labour, and was considered by the BCGEA to be a fraternal organization.

## Con

Our Association is truly democratic, building solidly on the foundation of the majority of the provincial public service, with a membership of 3200 of a possible 4500. We are now the largest association of provincial public servants in Canada.

Our founders were mostly employees from the lower grades and the bulk of membership and executive is still constituted by those grades. Our progress has been such that we are now representative of nearly every grade of employment in the service.

Our constitution provides that we endeavour by our joint efforts to obtain: just and equitable salaries and working conditions; to provide an efficient public service and to function solely as a non-political, non-partisan and non-sectarian body. An affiliation that would threaten any one of these fundamentals must be considered by any fair-minded individual as a real danger to the success of our Association.

Working on this basis the Association has accomplished, by its own unaided efforts:

- the right of making representations to a Minister;
- audience with the Executive Council;
- a new Civil Service Act;
- important improvements to the Superannuation Act;



## PRO

and Labour Congress; three delegates to its conventions; a full share in the shaping of TLC policy; assurance of full TLC support, locally and nationally, in our own and in collective programs, for the betterment of our fellow workers' conditions of employment.

We may have occasion to take up questions affecting us that are under the jurisdiction of the Dominion Government. In such negotiations the backing of a Dominion-wide organization such as the TLC, with its wide influence and membership, will be of inestimable value.

The TLC is a federation of separate, free and autonomous bodies which are so associated in order to more effectively work for the common objectives of workers through a united and powerful central organization. The TLC has no power whatever to impose any action on any of its affiliates. The TLC cannot dictate a strike policy on the part of any affiliated body, either on its own account or in sympathy with another body.

Is it wise to adopt this policy of affiliation when we seem to be making good progress in negotiations with our employer?

Yes. Some of our members may look about them and experience a comfortable feeling that for the past few years we and other workers are riding pretty high. We shall always hear the advice of the Cautious One -- "Let us learn to walk before we try to run. Tomorrow will be a more suitable time to consider affiliation with organized labour." But, we shall do well to look back a few years to the Hungry Thirties -- and then lose no time in affiliating with the broadest possible cross-section of workers, in an organization that has buffeted the storm.

We are far behind the times in the matter of affiliation with organized labour. Civil Servants of Alberta affiliated with the TLC 18 years ago! They affiliated at a time when there was widespread ignorance and misunderstanding about organized labour, such as does not exist today except in the backwaters of society and in the cobwebby corners of reactionary minds. Today the right of labour to organize is a plank in the platform of every political party.

One important result of affiliation will

## CON

- leave of absence for executive members, convention delegates and special committees;
- use of Government premises for meetings;
- successful representations on behalf of many specific complaints;
- the Victoria Cafeteria;
- the Benefit Society.

The foregoing examples represent excellent progress for so young an organization and all of them have been accomplished by our own unaided efforts, without an employer-employee agreement, and entirely apart from the assistance resulting from any affiliation.

While it is the largest, there are other federations of unions similar to the TLC whose combined membership is greater. There are many independent unions in Canada with no affiliation: various groups of telephone employees, railwaymen, automobile workers.

The 1944 Convention of the TLC authorized the creation of a Political Action Committee. Its stated objectives are the election of candidates who will support the aim and aspirations of organized labour and the defeat of those who are unsympathetic to the cause. In addition, the TLC has a provincial political action committee to assist in the work.

This province has much good labour legislation on the statutes. No one group can claim full credit for these. Political parties, various labour groups, public-spirited organizations, churches -- all have played a part in this good work.

We have a long way to go before we can say that we possess a smoothly-functioning experienced organization, with a membership properly aware of our value and conscious of all the work that is being done. The TLC would provide no practical, concrete assistance to our domestic development, while increasing our budget and making additional demands on the time of our officers. The work of building up our own organization is the obligation of every member, utilizing the energy of our financial and intellectual resources. Affiliation would be a waste of that energy.

Provincial Government employees are in a distinctly different category from most



## PRO

be a better understanding and appreciation of the problems and aims of workers in other walks of life. This may develop slowly, but must widen and grow. And who would deny that it is needed? If we are perfectly honest with ourselves, we will admit that the very nature of our employment, of our daily mode of life, and daily contacts tend to "fence us in." The common attitude of the public toward us does not help to remove this tendency to isolation. Affiliation and close association with other workers, as actual partners, will break down this wall of separation, will make apparent to workers and to the public at large that we do not belong, and do not wish to belong, in a watertight compartment of our own. We shall gain in the respect of the community and in our own self-confidence. We have already gained much by resolute, determined action. Now is no time to become weak-kneed and faint-hearted.

There are two sides to partnership in organized labour. Too long have government servants shirked responsibilities in the long struggle of organized labour, from which we have definitely and appreciably reaped benefits without doing so much as a hand's turn. The present status and living conditions of government employees, inferior as they may be, are nevertheless better than we could have hoped them to be had there not been a continuous and resolute struggle carried on by organized labour over the years.

Therefore, we should speed affiliation with fellow workers who have carried the load to date. One is ashamed to admit that government workers are heard to suggest that "we shall have labour's support in any case, as we have had it in the past." The less said about that point of view the better. Have we any right to expect that organized labour would continue to lend us its full support should we, as a large and important group of workers in the community, coolly decide still to shirk our obligations?

The evolution of the TLC is already accomplished for us, and it is logical for us immediately to fit into our appropriate place alongside the B.C. Teachers Federation, the Civil Servants Associations of Alberta and Saskatchewan, and the 85 other organizations of public employees who have done the spade work for us--while we slept.

## CON

other groups. We differ from most TLC affiliates in that we have but one employer; therefore, our status as Provincial Government employees is unusual. We have repeatedly recognized and accepted this in our efforts to obtain a proper system of collective bargaining. Therefore, affiliation with any labour organization is without value to us in the vital matter of collective bargaining. Our only real prospect of obtaining just and equitable consideration of our grievances is through co-operative negotiations between the two parties involved.

Our responsibilities are clearly defined in the Constitution. We have not yet discharged them fully, and until we do, we should bend every effort in that direction and not waste our time and money on a program of affiliation. In answer to the claim that we have a responsibility to labour because their work has indirectly benefitted us, we feel that even if this is true, we must beware of (sic) of the emotional appeals and inferential argument in that assertion. Even if labour has helped us, our gratitude is to labour as a whole and not just to the TLC part of it.

Let us not be deluded by supporters of unionism that we gain any practical advantage from affiliation. Any outstanding injustices affecting our members must be remedied in the same manner as those already rectified. Constant, but reasonable and intelligently presented pressure on the Government by our leaders is the proper and only effective method of obtaining lasting reforms for our welfare. We must not hinder our representatives by making them wear the badge of the Trades and Labour Congress, or of any other group not directly connected with our efforts.

Even assuming that the general principle of affiliation is sound, that our fundamental aims and objects are common to those held by organized, as well as unorganized labour, it does not follow that a formal, legal affiliation would advance either our cause or theirs. We can still maintain, according to our personal inclinations, a sympathy for the aims and aspirations of the Congress and labour generally, while holding to the view that affiliation -- in our present immature state -- would curtail our internal development.



## PRO

Some of our members will say, "We must stand on our own feet and have nothing to do with other labour groups." Yes, we are capable of standing on our own feet--the very existence of our organization proves it. We have already seen what a little organization can mean to us, in cold cash, in our own Association. Affiliation with other workers throughout the country is the next logical step. There is no getting away from the basic fact that throughout our lifetimes the status and living conditions of workers generally will always affect us to our dying day, as they always have affected us, directly or indirectly, from the day of our births. We have thus the immediate obligation, in our own selfish interests, as well as for more public-spirited reasons, to assume our full share of labour's load, commensurate with the numbers and experience and intelligence of our membership. ●

## CON

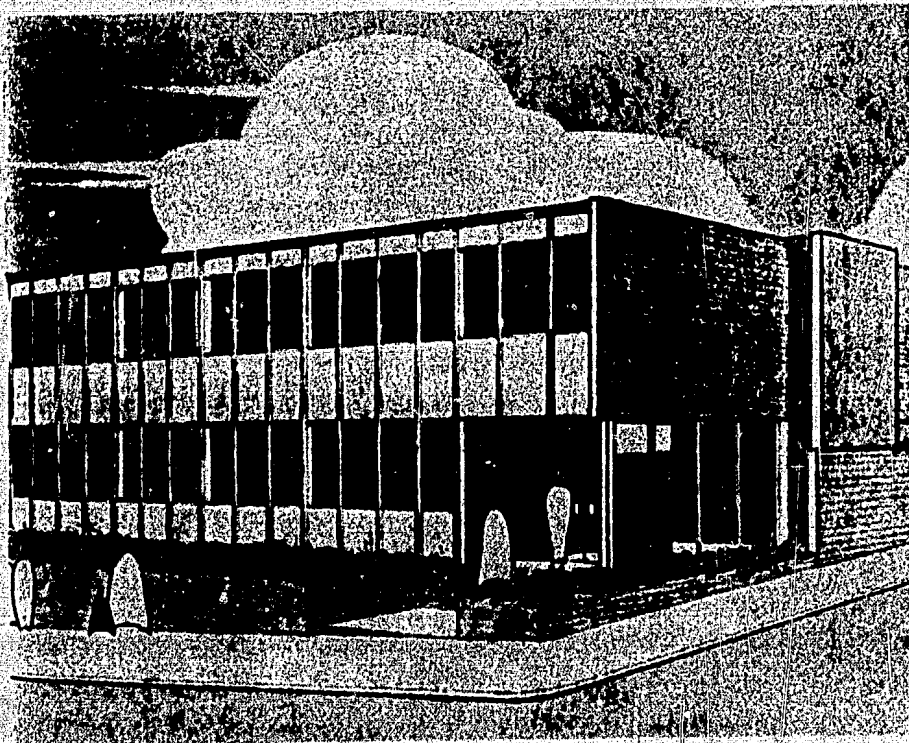
One cannot affiliate in name only, pay one's dues and let it go at that. If affiliation creates benefits, then our active participation in the Congress is necessary. It is sure to require the expenditure of time and funds. Bearing this in mind we need consider our own imperfect and immature development only for a moment to realize how far we must progress before we can properly claim full representation of the great majority. So much of our own house is still to be built before we can realize a solid, enduring, province-wide organization with experience, stature and maturity. It is then that we will be in a position to settle the question of affiliation, when we have reached the point in our development where, possessed of time, funds, background and strength, we can qualify, if we so wish, for real, active affiliation. Until that time, we should concentrate all our efforts on our internal organization and growth. ●

### VOTE FOR AFFILIATION

### VOTE AGAINST AFFILIATION

(The membership cast their votes in favour of affiliation, and in 1945 the BCGEU joined the Trades and Labour Congress.)

Old BCGEU headquarters at West 4th Ave. and Arbutus in Vancouver.



*Labour History* Spring 1979/32



# LESSON PLAN

Gary Onstad



## A Great Debate

**GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS:** It is the task of your committee to prepare materials for a campaign in which you will try to convince the membership of the B.C. Government Employees Association to vote in favour of your Committee's position on whether to affiliate with the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada. The Campaign will be directed at the membership and will focus on a Public Debate which will take place at the Annual Convention.

**SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS:** 1. Read and discuss the arguments for and against your Committee's position. Your Committee should reach a consensus on which arguments you want to stress in the campaign before assigning the work below.

2. Elect a Chairperson who will be responsible for the organization and co-ordination of the activities of your Committee.

3. Your Committee should produce, as a minimum, the following:

a) Design three posters which support your Committee's position;

b) Design a T-shirt logo with an appropriate slogan to support your position;

c) Draft a form letter from your Committee to each member, outlining your arguments on why they should support your Committee. This form letter will be distributed prior to the Public Debate;

d) Design any other aid that would help your campaign, e.g., bumper stickers, buttons, etc.;

e) Prepare for the Public Debate by choosing two speakers who will present your position in the Debate and prepare arguments for rebuttal. Each speaker will be allotted two minutes for the presentation, and one minute for rebuttal.

4. Other arguments that your Committee may wish to consider are outlined below:

**PRO:** It is the right and duty of all citizens to take political action, both individually and collectively, through organizations which represent their interests.

Because civil servants work for Government, not for political parties, they have the same basic rights as any other workers in society. There is no difference between government and non-government workers.

"Professionalism" has always divided government workers among them-

*Labour History Spring 1979/33*



selves and separated them from non-government workers. "Professionalism" has always worked against our collective interests.

The Union movement needs to be strengthened.

CON: Civil Servants, as employees of government, are a special class of workers. They, therefore, should not be associated with political action, but should be objective at all times.

Civil Servants must recognize that they could find themselves in a conflict of interest if they are part of a group favouring one political party, while, as government employees, they are working for a government elected from another political party.

Many of our members are professionals who have special training for their jobs and are, therefore, not truly members of labour.

The Union movement is too strong.

BRITISH COLUMBIA SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION  
SPRING CONFERENCE--APRILS 27 and 28, 1979  
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

"TEACHING HUMAN RIGHTS"

\*Keynote Address: Kathleen Ruff, Human Rights Commissioner

\*Address: Shelagh Day, former Equal Employment Opportunity Officer, Vancouver

\*Informal Debate: The subject is the so-called "Right to Work" laws threatening organized labour in B.C. and North America.

Moderator: Frank Fuller, President, Labour History Assn.

PRO: Darrell Anderson, Faculty of Ed., Simon Fraser Univ., member of the Social Credit Party of B.C.

CON: Fernie Violla, International First Vice-President of the I.W.A. and Director of I.W.A. organizing drives throughout North America.

\*Workshops: 21 workshops on the subject of Human Rights, including three suggested by the Labour History Association under the theme of "Teaching Human Rights to Future Workers."

\*Conference Fee: for one day's attendance - \$10; students - \$12; regular fee (for members of BCSSTA or the Labour History Assn.) - \$18; non-member fee - \$20.

\*For More Information: Contact Ms. Glenys Galloway  
#202 - 1590 W. 15th Av.,  
Vancouver V5N 2P9



# REVIEW

PETER SEIXAS

Laxer, Robert M., ed., *Technological Change and the Workforce*, 64 pp.; *Unions and the Collective Bargaining Process*, 77 pp.; *Union Organization and Strikes*, 103 pp. Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto, Ontario, 1978.

These three short books, by a team under the general editorship of Robert Laxer (editor of *Canada Ltd.*), were written specifically for classroom use. They have been tested and evaluated in Ontario and Quebec schools, and they include discussion questions at the end of each chapter. They deal with each subject on a sophisticated, conceptual level. However, despite clear writing, a teacher at the senior high school level would have to exercise great care in the presentation of this material. These are not books for most students to read independently.

*Technological Change and the Workforce* would perhaps best fit an economics course, though it would be appropriate in other senior social studies courses, too. It includes, as one aspect of the definition of technology, the organization of work, and emphasizes the social context of all human activity. From that starting point, it explores, historically, the meaning of technological change for workers and the social implications of the change from craft production to factory production.

Case studies of conflict in the Post Office and in the Building Trades illustrate ways in which workers have fought back against erosion of their living standards, their rights and collective power. One chapter, entitled "Legislating the Impact of Change," deals with the Government's role.

The final chapter treats the contemporary Canadian economy, posing the problems of a capital-intensive vs labour-intensive industry, of an economy based largely on extractive industry, and of regional disparities in manufacturing. A number of charts provide a wealth of material for students to analyze.

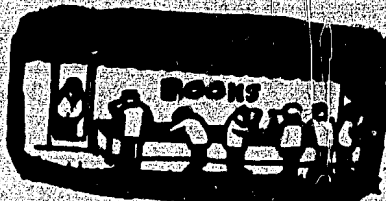
*Unions and the Collective Bargaining Process* deals at some length with strikes,

union organization, collective agreements, grievance procedures, and alternatives to bargaining. In the chapter on strikes, there is an excellent, succinct, point-by-point refutation of common arguments brought to bear against unions involved in strikes. The volume as a whole, however, treats the subject in more detail than one would want in a high school class. Perhaps its most appropriate use in such a setting would be as a reference volume.

*Union Organization and Strikes* is more of a history book than the other two, but even this one is no lightweight when it comes to analysis. An introductory chapter sets the historical and legal context for four strikes (Grand Trunk, 1910; Windsor Forc, 1945; Stelco, 1946; and Asbestos, 1949). In following chapters each strike is dealt with individually. All strikes involved male workers; all took place in Eastern Canada; all represented attempts to win union recognition; and all were particularly bitter.

These four strikes were chosen, not as a "cross section" of Canadian strike activity, but for their value in explaining the origins of Canadian industrial relations as they existed through the 1950's and '60's. The final chapter notes that the 1970's may well be a time of another fundamental change in Canadian industrial relations, with the public sector workers in the forefront.

It will take skillful teaching and capable students for this book to be of value. But, any student who does follow the arguments will be in a very good position to analyze current developments in labour relations.



Labour History Spring 1979/80



cont'd from p.3 / that are 'public' but not governmental, of schools and hospitals that are not entirely dependent upon the government in Victoria mean that we must extend our comprehension of public employment.

In addition, there are other jobs and other unions who provide services to the public and are usually dependent upon public funds to some degree, for example transportation and utilities. These workers may or may not be members of "government employee" unions, but they are workers in the public sector. Thus, "public sector worker" is probably the best descrip-

tion. To go a little farther, some political scientists use the term *public sector worker* as synonymous with *state worker* - since the state (as an institution with links in many parts of society) is an even more general term. A few would even consider government employees (strictly speaking), public sector employees, and those who contribute to shaping the values of our society and its current structure as *state workers*. Thus, teachers, courthouse workers, and even media workers (such as those at C.B.C.) are included.

State Workers*, 1946-74 (selected years and periods)				
	Total state workers		New state workers	
	Number	As percentage of all workers	Number	As percentage of all workers
1946	417,430	8.9		
1951	553,897	10.9		
1946-51			136,467	31.7
1956	707,008	12.6		
1951-56			153,111	31.4
1961	984,562	16.3		
1956-61			277,554	59.0
1966	1,367,738	19.1		
1961-66			383,176	34.9
1971	1,781,172	22.1		
1966-71			413,434	44.6
1974	1,939,720	21.2		
1971-74			158,548	15.0
1946-74			1,522,290	34.0

SOURCE: Hugh Armstrong, "The Labour Force and State Workers in Canada," in *The Canadian State*, ed. Leo Panitch, University of Toronto Press, 1977.

\*Cy Gonick, "The State as Employer," *Out of Work*, James Lorimer & Co., Toronto 1978:

\* "The 1974 figure of 1,940,000 includes 349,000 federal civil servants, 450,000 provincial civil servants and 387,000 municipal employees; 413,000 in the education field; and 341,000 hospital workers. Excluded from these numbers are most employees in federal and provincial crown corporations (275,000), all military personnel (81,000) and employees of nonprofit, publicly funded agencies like Children's Aid Society. If these were added to the total, then about 2.4 million workers draw their wages and salaries directly from the public payroll, or almost 27 per cent of the entire labour force. And this still leaves out the number of workers in the private sector whose jobs depend on government spending on goods and services, for which we have no adequate measure.

"We should note... that the state provides the livelihood of a good number of Canadians other than through the jobs that are created in the public sector. There are 1,800,000 old age pensioners, 140,000 war pensioners, 100,000 retired civil servants, 1,500,000 recipients of Canada Assistance, 820,000 recipients of unemployment insurance. Adding these to the 2.4 million whose incomes stem from their jobs as state employees, some 6.8 million individuals derive their livelihood from the state. If we include their families, then close to 10 million Canadians, almost half the entire population, is directly dependent on the state for their daily livelihood.

*Labour History* Spring 1979/36





# the labour history association

**BRITISH COLUMBIA TEACHERS' FEDERATION**  
**105-2235 BURRARD STREET**  
**VANCOUVER, B.C. V6J 3H9**

Sign up that non-member



**LABOUR HISTORY PSA**  
**Membership Application Form**

MAIL TO: B.C. Teachers' Federation  
105 - 2235 Burrard Street  
Vancouver, B.C. V6J 3H9

Social Insurance Number

Mr., Mrs., Miss, Dr., Ms.

Surname

Given Name

Initial

Mailing Address

City

Postal Code

School District Number

Name and address of school/institution/business

Name and address of school/institution/business

TYPE OF MEMBERSHIP

**BCTF Members \$8**

**non-BCTF Members \$8**

**Students \$5**

- ☐ a Full ☐ b BCTF Associate Member ☐ c Non-BCTF Member  
☐ d Student ☐ e BCTF Honorary Associate Member ☐ f BCTF Honorary Life Member

Make cheque payable to B.C. Teachers' Federation. DO NOT MAIL CASH

Total fee enclosed                      Cheque            Money Order                     

*Labour History* Spring 1979/37



If undelivered return to:  
The Labour History Assn.  
c/o The B.C. Teachers' Federation  
2235 Burrard Street  
Vancouver, B.C. V6J 3H9

Most footprints in the sands of time  
were made by workshoes. -Anonymous.