"An intelligent and conscientious opposition is a part of loyalty." Bainbridge Colby

Background

I am a North Vancouver teacher who sees the need for the BCTF to change its tactics and culture to more responsively reflect the will of members. I have come to see that is necessary to spread the message to the wider public in order to encourage healthy debate that is stifled within the confines of the union arena. I am passionate supporter of quality public education. If British Columbians are to fully support public education then we need to be transparent. The current BCTF action plan will dramatically hinder support for public education. It is my duty to speak out to inform other teachers and the public of what is going on.

Draft alternative plan for BCTF members.

This is an appeal to BC teachers and the BCTF Executive Committee to modify the current BCTF Action Plan scheduled for a vote on April 17-19, 2012. The plan has been presented as one which that cannot be modified and must be supported in its entirety. If that stays the case, many members who would otherwise support a more well-thought out plan will be forced to against it. While we strongly repudiate Bill 22 and the BC government's hostility towards public education, we cannot support this plan because of the damage it will do. BC Teachers have options in how to respond to these provocations but the current BCTF Executive Committee has chosen to ignore alternatives to the current plan. There are serious legal and financial implications to taking action in the current environment. These factors may imperil the BCTF's existence.

Bill 22 was a clever piece of legislation that sought to create an environment where teachers are afraid to act due to punitive fines. It was a desperate act made by a government on its last legs seeking to pick a fight and hoping to attract right-wing voters whom they are bleeding to the BC Conservative Party. Unfortunately, the BCTF is taking the bait and seeking to go down a path that will only divide teachers while alienating the students and parents whose support we depend on.

BC teachers are proud to serve their communities and have continued to provide a world-class education to the students of British Columbia. This is despite not having the appropriate resources and being burdened by excessive administrative duties that take away from our primary focus: teaching and supporting students.

Quality public education is the foundation of our society and is the economic engine that builds prosperity. This plan is a call to the 41,000 teachers to stand up to intransigence on both sides and work together to support public education.

This modified plan is based on three points:

- 1. **Teachers require public support if we are to achieve our aims.** Our goal is to build sustainable support from citizens who will more clearly see the benefit of quality public education and be willing to support our efforts to deliver it. We need to engage the public authentically and *ask* how we can best serve them instead of *telling* them. Building these relationships with other stakeholders in the education system is at the heart of our strategy. This takes time and cannot be initiated just for a campaign. The current communications strategy reflects a top-down mentality. This must change.
- 2. The actions we take must be built on a common perspective so members are on board with the strategies we pursue. We are a Federation of 41,000 diverse members who are made more effective by working together for our common interests. There are parts of the proposed action plan that should be removed and be replaced with more effective tactics. However, no modifications have been allowed. The proposed provincial ban on extra-curricular activities is unenforceable. The proposed province-wide withdrawal of services could incur fines that would bankrupt the BCTF in a matter of days. We need to plan our next steps carefully.

3. We need to Exhaust all tactics *before* considering the illegal components of *The Action Plan*

If we are to maintain our legitimacy with the public, we need to find more innovative and legal ways to convey our point. There are alternatives to the current BCTF plan that seeks to take on the government head-on. Now is the perfect time to explore our options and act out of a position of strength when the time is right. We can take action that has broad support not only from teachers but also from the public. Quality public education is worth taking the time to get it right.

Respectfully,

Stephen Zlotnik