



1984

B.C. Solidarity Update: new Reality or New Brutality?

Diamond, Sara

Suggested citation:

Diamond, Sara (1984) B.C. Solidarity Update: new Reality or New Brutality? Fuse Magazine, 8 (1&2). pp. 4-6. ISSN 0838-603X Available at <http://openresearch.ocadu.ca/id/eprint/1875/>

Open Research is a publicly accessible, curated repository for the preservation and dissemination of scholarly and creative output of the OCAD University community. Material in Open Research is open access and made available via the consent of the author and/or rights holder on a non-exclusive basis.

The OCAD University Library is committed to accessibility as outlined in the [Ontario Human Rights Code](#) and the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act \(AODA\)](#) and is working to improve accessibility of the Open Research Repository collection. If you require an accessible version of a repository item contact us at repository@ocadu.ca.

B.C. Solidarity Update

New Reality or New Brutality?

S A R A D I A M O N D

VANCOUVER — WITH THE RE-treat of Solidarity, the Socred's 1983 and 1984 budgets are hitting home. Labour, feminist and human rights activists are fighting difficult battles on isolated ground. While 100,000 marched for peace in Vancouver's streets on April 28, the Solidarity mobilization against the new budget in March drew a mere 3,000 supporters. Meanwhile, Milton Friedman has lauded British Columbia as the ideal democracy — one in which election promises become lies and the New Right's economic and social policies are bearing their bitter fruit. During the past week, debate within the labour and popular movements has centred on the viability of a Solidarity II. Here, I will provide an update to the feature, "B.C. Solidarity" (FUSE, Spring 1984), outlining some of the more recent events and developments in the province.

The Labour Front

CONSTRUCTION: The long foreseen battle to protect construction industry unions erupted in March. The Labour Relations Board reversed a longstanding precedent which insured that contracts could not be turned over to non-union construction firms if begun by union labour. Building union pickets shut down Pennyfarthing Construction at its Harbour Cove site. This company is run by Bill Kerkhoff, a self-proclaimed folk hero and militant anti-unionist "armed with strong family ties and a deep religious conviction". (*Vancouver Sun*) Many of the trades picketers had been unemployed for as long as two years, moving from well-paid jobs with decent working conditions to Unemployment Insurance and then welfare. The B.C. and Yukon Building Trades Council was able to mobilize four hundred on active picket duty with 2-3,000 more, including feminists, public sector workers, etc., present for mass pickets. They demanded that the site be built by union

labour. Picketing continued despite an injunction, until the leadership of the Building Trades were found to be in contempt of court. Despite rank and file militancy, the Council decided to discontinue picketing, told its members to vacate the site and promised that the battle would continue in the context of EXPO '86.

EXPO '86: The real issue behind the Kerkhoff showdown was who would build EXPO. Unfortunately non-union contractors and the government had won the first round. (Legislation banning construction industry strikes has been looming for a long time.) In the aftermath of Pennyfarthing, the Socreds, aided by EXPO king Jim Pattison, threatened to cancel the fair unless the trades agreed to the liberal use of non-union construction labour on the site. While many B.C.ers secretly wondered whether the threatened cancellation would be a result of poor government planning and massive overspending (the EXPO budget is some three times its original projection), the government blamed the construction unions, suggesting that they were "Bad B.C.ers", holding the province to ransom and denying many the right to a job. In mid-April the government decided to go on with the show that would place Vancouver "on the world stage". Bennett promised legislation to make EXPO "an open site", with an advisory council to police workers and make all job action on the site illegal, a virtual war measures act. In negotiations the building trades argued for union rates for non-union EXPO construction labour, a step back from earlier intentions to organize the site.

In response to these developments the Carpenters' Union held an "Expose EXPO" public meeting. Calls for a revitalized Solidarity II ("the general can't retreat when the movement is advancing") have been heard from the trades, Vancouver aldermen and NDP representatives. In other quarters plans are forming for "AXPO '86" — a counter event to provide city and visitors with a critical perspective.

On May 9th the government announced the new Labour Code. Its key points include: banning of political protest (i.e. solidarity-type strike action); an end to secondary picketing; automatic decertification of unions with a 45% decertification vote. The Code now gives the cabinet the right to designate any job site an "economic development project", removing the right to strike and allowing cabinet to override any union contract. It would be an "open site", allowing the untrammelled use of non-union labour.

The new Code allows Cabinet (rather than The Labour Relations Board) to examine union constitutions and to decide whether strike votes, discipline of members, etc. are legitimate or appropriate. In essence, it gives Cabinet an open hand in all union affairs. This legislation will make negotiations very difficult, while breaking existing unions, particularly those with jurisdiction over Bennett's mega-projects. It's an employer's hard-core fantasy come true.

PULP INDUSTRY: The pulp industry locked out its workers for months. The two pulp unions, the Canadian Pulpworkers' Union and the Pulp and Paper Workers' Union of Canada, had decided to reject the poor 3-year contract that the International Woodworkers of America had settled for. Instead they wanted an increase in the first year of a two-year contract, security and health and safety provisions. The government imposed a back-to-work order and continues to threaten an imposed settlement. Pulp workers have faced not only the concerted efforts of the Employers' Council of B.C., the Pulp and Paper Industrial Relations Bureau and the government, but also the vocal hostility of the IWA in the persona of Jack Munro (remember Kelowna?) who has publically denounced their efforts to better the IWA contract.

TRANSIT: Transit workers in Vancouver have also fared poorly in reaching a contract. After months of stalled negotiations they began an "unstrike", a ground-

breaking strategy geared to educating the public that it is government cutbacks that erode public transportation, not the drivers' attitudes to their work. Bus drivers have worn civilian clothes to work and collected only 25¢ and a promisory note from riders. As of May 9 actions will include a full day strike.

Social Services

As of April, twenty-one family and childcare facilities, formerly run by the Ministry of Human Resources, became private services. Services include Vancouver Transition House, now run by the YWCA and Gravelly House, an emergency shelter for one to seven year olds, now owned by Ro-Di Management, residential treatment centres and group homes. These are contracted out on a yearly basis. The Vancouver Status of Women, one of the bulwarks of the Vancouver women's movement has had its funding completely terminated. WAVAW/Rape Crisis Centre received a five percent budget cut while demand on their facilities is on the rise. Other services, such as the Elizabeth Fry Society, Native Courtworkers and the People's Law School have been placed on an interim two month budget until the government decides their future.

WELFARE: The new budget cut welfare by \$25-\$80 per month. People awaiting Unemployment Insurance are no longer eligible for welfare in B.C. Those applying for social assistance must now "exhaust all available income or assets". This is interpreted to include all lines of credit, including credit cards. This has led to speculations as to when B.C. will open debtor's prisons.

Tenants Rights

The government replaced its much-protested Bill 5 with an equally disastrous new Bill 19. It will now cost tenants thirty dollars to lay a complaint against a landlord. Landlords can evict for "reasonable Cause" — a term which is at no point defined in the legislation. Rents are decontrolled.

Human Rights

The week of May 1 saw a vigil at the steps fo the B.C. Legislature by human rights groups. The new human rights package is described by Harbans Dhillon, rights activist, as "a massive fraud on the people of B.C. It is a fraud

because it claims to protect human rights when it in fact legalized discrimination". Ignorning all submissions during the "consultation process", the new Bill 11 eliminated the Human Rights Commission, excludes many groups from protection and gives sweeping powers to the new appointed council to dismiss complaints it considers "vexatious, frivolous or in bad faith". There is no appeal procedure.

ever until the new labour code was introduced, the B.C. Federation of Labour Executive was publically divided on this question. While Art Kube, the Federation's leader, supported the initiative, other key players are strongly opposed. Jack Munro has stated that the people of B.C. want to work, not protest. They would not support a general strike. Other unionists would support a union-based coalition (Operation Solidarity model) but without



Henri Robideau

JEANNIE KAMINS' PAINTING OF THE B.C. CABINET. From top left, clockwise: 'King' Billy Bennett, Grace McCarthy (Human Resources), Jim Nielsen (Health), Jack 'Scab' Munro, Energy Minister Rogers, Jim Hewitt (Consumer/Corporate Affairs), Jack Heinrich (Education), Pat McGeer ('protector' of universities), Brian Smith (Attorney General), Bob McClelland, Jim Chabot (provincial secretary), Hugh Curtis (Finance)

Education

David Thompson University Centre, the only university outside of the Lower Mainland and Victoria is now closed by government dictate. 65% of its students were women from the West Kootenay area. Colleges and universities elsewhere are engaged in the painful and often political process of cutting programmes and departments to meet slender budgets.

Resistance

Although the Solidarity movement has been in crisis since the November strike ended, the vehement assault on construction unionism drew out thousands of supporters. The spirit on the Pennyfarthing picket lines was that of a fight to the death. There is growing impetus for a SOLIDARITY II. How-

the participation of community groups through the Solidarity Coalition. Community and women's groups are somewhat skeptical about reuniting with labour after the betrayals of '83.

With the introduction of the new Labour Code, the B.C. Federation has begun to re-unite Operation Solidarity (the union component). Mike Kramer, Federation vice-president, and Kube, have threatened the government with a united and militant fightback by labour, one far beyond the scope of the fall 1983. The extent to which these threats (promises?) will become reality is, as of this date, unclear.

Women Against the Budget organized a series of discussions through its Budget University that drew many activists searching for a means to consolidate the lessons of the Solidarity Coalition. David Thompson University Centre is presently occupied by a group of senior citizens from the

Kootenays. The city council of Nelson is fighting the provincial government to enable it to take over administration of the centre.

The NDP leadership race is underway. Margaret Birrell, a strong feminist and fighter for trade union rights is running to revitalize the party's role in opposing the government. She has fought for the full promise of Solidarity (restoration of social services, trade union rights, etc.) as part of her campaign. The support of other candidates for Solidarity is more qualified. In November Barrett and the NDP refused to support the strikers. The leadership debate has placed the NDP back in the public eye as an opposition force.

While B.C. residents watch the EXPO slogan "Man in Motion" whirl at us through high tech t.v. ads, many of us feel unsure of our future: Will the upcoming months bring motion sickness or a revitalized Solidarity?

Sara Diamond

Bill C-24 & the CC: Who'll be in Control?

Living in the late nuclear age may be irrelevant when it comes to the speed of legislative action and reform, but when governments head into that condition of pre-election panic, it seems that anything can happen — and happen very quickly. Which is to say that by the time you read this there is a possibility that The Canada Council's existence as an independent, arm's length cultural agency may be no more. In its place could be The Canada Council, Crown Corporation, governed under Schedule C, Part One, of the newly amended *Financial Administration Act*. The Council would then be governed in the illustrious company of VIA Rail Canada Inc., Defence Construction (1951) Ltd., Canada Post and about thirty-five other non-cultural crown corporations.

Timed, as these matters are, for optimum political gain, Mr. Herb Gray President of the Treasury Board recently tabled "New Legislative Proposals for the Control and Accountability of Crown Corporations". Bill C-24 has already been read in Parliament and is being submitted to a

Parliamentary committee where it is expected to be obstructed long enough for it not to survive this session of Parliament. However, it will inevitably be re-introduced by the new governing Tories or the new governing "left of centre" Liberals, because government self-control and accountability are believed to be among the most popular part costumes to be worn before an angry electorate.

The Canada Council has formally protested its inclusion in Bill C-24 stating that "it would subject the Council to new forms of Government control". Council believes its accountability is well-served by the existing legislation — The Canada Council Act (1957). Furthermore, the Council's objection is strongly supported within the recent Federal Cultural Policy Committee's Report. And just to confuse those who would like to believe in the durability of the funding status quo, the Minister of Communications currently responsible for The Canada Council, Francis Fox, was seen on television supporting the Council's position despite the fact that officials within his Department have admitted that they agreed with the inclusion of The Canada Council within the new controlling legislation.

Super civil servant and the D.O.C.'s Assistant Deputy Minister, David Silcox (who would remain in his position of power even if the Rhinoceros Party were to get elected) claims that the Council's fears of the increased threat of direct political interference amounts to "paranoia". Not surprisingly, it is the likes of Mr. Silcox that keeps the officers, middle and upper management of the Canada Council, awake at night. The arts lobby that could eventually keep the government out of the Council's filing system does have a high media profile, but it is rather short on numbers. It also includes the likes of ourselves, whose political engagement is often ambiguous, half-hearted and even at times organizationally conservative. The ongoing struggle for control between the D.O.C. and The Canada Council is further complicated by the D.O.C.'s ability to finance larger and more attractive programs (definitely government controlled) including new plans for Film and Video currently going

through Cabinet which will be announced before the appearance of this report.

Tim Porteous, Director of The Canada Council, recently outlined what could be the expected changes arising from C-24 or subsequent legislation. There are three main areas of government control:

- Power of directives.
 - Submission of an annual corporate plan.
 - Government's right to change The Canada Council's By-laws.
- The directives would be tabled in Parliament and responsibility for them would clearly rest with the government. In the statement of objectives of C-24 there is a paragraph that states:

"The government considers it inappropriate to issue directives that could be construed as interference in cultural activities that Parliament has entrusted to certain Crown Corporations. The Bill therefore provides that no directive could be issued to The Canada Council, the CBC, the CFDC or the National Arts Center Corporation dealing with the form or content of a project, production or broadcast program. The same prohibition would apply to directives concerning the provision of financial assistance by these corporations to any person or group. Any other directive issued to these corporations would be tabled in Parliament, and the Bill provides that no action on the directive could be taken until 30 days after tabling."

Frankly, these reassurances, echoed by Mr. Silcox who said, "it would be an intrepid politician who would choose to interfere on a day-to-day basis", are not very comforting. Despite the Council's arm's-length protection, the Seventies were littered with reactionary members of Parliament jumping out of their seats to object to Council's support for various Explorations projects, Pulp Press, bill bissett, CEAC — the list is both long and well remembered. The government's current promise of long-term ethical intentions has to be weighed against their record of using job creation programs, urban development projects and so on as handy-to-use, quick-to-apply political glues for any amount of electoral fence mending. The fact that the Minister of Communications has just given The