



CANADIAN UNION OF PUBLIC EMPLOYEES
SYNDICAT CANADIEN DE LA FONCTION PUBLIQUE

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S T A T E M E N T

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It is well known to people in this province that there is a crisis in education at all levels - elementary, high school, college and university levels. All are severely threatened, demoralized and struggling to fulfill their mandates.

At some universities here in B.C., the situation has gone beyond crisis to emergency. Employees are working within an environment of fear and uncertainty. At the Universities of British Columbia and Victoria, something has arisen that has worsened an already intolerable situation. A company, Ritchie and Associates, a large American consulting firm, has been conducting a cost-cutting review of the non-academic departments at both universities. University administrators at both institutions brought Ritchie and Associates in with virtually no advance notice to employees, department heads or deans. This lack of information - before and since - has led to a great deal of speculation and disturbing rumours, which have served to exacerbate an already tense working climate.

Generally employees at both universities had been used to being well informed about administrative decisions, with management making an effort to stay in touch with their employees. But on the issue of Ritchie and Associates, there hasn't been a word. It's been nothing but secrecy.

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This secrecy typifies an overall attitude by management today towards education and educational institutions throughout the province. (Ultimately, universities are public institutions administered by managements hired by the Government. Ultimately, the Government must take responsibility for the health and well-being of these institutions.) This behaviour is another example of the Government's continuing attack on the educational system, be it through Ritchie and Associates, or the firing of the Vancouver School Board, or cutbacks in needed educational support services.

The presence of Ritchie and Associates has increased the already tense working environment at both universities. The employees involved realize that - in general terms - benefits could perhaps be derived from studies which are carried out effectively. But with no consultation on an issue such as this, studies on any workplace are destined to be ineffective at best and damaging at worst.

Beyond that, there is the issue of cost. All indications are that Ritchie and Associates are costing the Universities of British Columbia and Victoria large quantities of money. It seems odd to us that, at a time of restraint, and a time when both universities are pleading "no funds", they should be spending big money in this manner.

It seems that the days of involving employees in building a stronger education system are gone. Gone too are the days of treating employees with respect and consideration. The Government and management have lost sight

of what makes our educational system, including our universities, strong. That is the people who work in them: from the professors and teachers, right through to the custodians and maintenance people and the ever-essential administrative people. It is they who are the heart and soul of our educational system. It is they who ultimately make the difference between a good institution and an average institution.

I call on the management of the University of Victoria and the University of British Columbia to answer the following points of important public interest:

1. Are Ritchie and Associates members of the Association of Consulting Management Engineers, and governed by their mandatory Code of Professional Responsibilities? If not, why not?
2. Are Ritchie and Associates being paid fees based partly on the savings they recommend? If so, what guarantee is there that Ritchie and Associates will behave with professional detachment in assessing potential areas of savings, instead of as bounty hunters?
3. Will the managements of the two universities sit down with their employees as soon as possible, to talk about this intolerable situation? Will they involve their employees, make them part of the system again, and in doing so strengthen education overall through the kind of collaboration and consultation that is at the heart of a strong and independent educational system?

Where's the money coming from?