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Topics a Union President Visited to Mobilize Members
Thèmes traités par un président de centrale syndicale afin de mobiliser ses membres
Temas abordados por un presidente sindical para movilizar a sus miembros

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Résumé de l'article

Dans cet article, nous analysons quatre appels à l'action collective lancés par Jim Iker, président de la Fédération des enseignants de la Colombie-Britannique (FECB). Ces appels visaient à mobiliser les membres lors de la négociation collective de 2013-2014, laquelle opposait la FECB au gouvernement de la Colombie-Britannique et à l'employeur direct, l'Association des employeurs des écoles publiques de Colombie-Britannique. Pour y parvenir, nous utilisons une « théorie de la rhétorique » développée par Chaim Perelman afin d'identifier et d'analyser les thèmes que le président de la FTCB a utilisés pour convaincre ses membres d'adhérer à ses arguments sur le mérite de l'action collective.

Nous soutenons que le président a élaboré sa rhétorique à partir des cinq thèmes suivants : l'urgence d'agir, l'équité, la futilité, la nécessité de l'action et l'intégrité. Les trois premiers s'appuyaient sur une logique utilitaire en faveur de l'action collective. Iker les a utilisés dans le but de persuader les enseignants et les autres parties prenantes à la négociation que l'action collective était devenue nécessaire afin de s'attaquer au problème principal, soit la futilité du processus de négociation visant à parvenir à un accord négocié, cela en raison de la réticence du gouvernement à négocier de bonne foi. Les deux derniers thèmes, l'action et l'intégrité, comportaient une rhétorique de réconfort et de réassurance offrant une logique affective pour agir collectivement. Certains syndiqués, de même que d'autres intervenants, auraient pu penser que les enseignants devraient d'abord se consacrer à leur tâche dans leur salle de classe, plutôt que de se retrouver sur un piquet de grève, retirant ainsi la prestation d'un service dont ils détiennent le monopole. Iker a alors utilisé les thèmes de l'importance d'agir et de l'intégrité pour rappeler à chacun et à chacune que défendre les étudiants, les jeunes enseignants, tout comme la profession enseignante et le système d'éducation, était incontournable. Il les a également rassurés en faisant valoir que, collectivement, ils ne seront pas ignorés et qu'ils n'échoueront pas.

En bref, nous avons identifié cinq thèmes que le président a soulevés dans le but d'entraîner ses membres à agir collectivement. Ces thèmes mettent en évidence une rhétorique unique visant à persuader les enseignants à devenir des agents de protestation. Toutefois, notre méthodologie d'étude de cas ne nous permet pas de généraliser ces résultats, car davantage de recherches seront nécessaires afin de les corroborer.

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Topics a Union President Visited to Mobilize Members

Yonathan Reshef and Charles Keim

We explore how the British Columbia Teachers' Federation president used language to mobilize union members for collective action. We look at four appeals to action he sent during a recent labour conflict to understand how he constructed his calls to justify collective action and inspire agency. In particular, we survey the main topics, or commonplaces, he visited to develop his arguments, and discuss why he chose them and how he applied them to construct a reality conducive to collective action.

KEYWORDS: **rhetoric, labour conflict, teachers, collective action, government.**

Introduction

We analyze four calls to action issued by the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) president, Jim Iker. His appeals sought to mobilize members during the 2013-2014 collective bargaining that pitted the BCTF against the British Columbia (BC) government and the British Columbia Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA), the bargaining agent for the public sector K-12 education. The on-going government-BCTF conflict has been described as "without question, the single most defining characteristic of public education in the province for the past four decades" (Fleming, 2011: 12). The 2013-2014 bargaining round was yet another chapter in this bitter conflict.

The parties commenced negotiating a new agreement in early 2013. Yet by June 30, when the current agreement expired, their differences remained. To encourage a negotiated settlement, the union orchestrated a three-pronged collective action. It began a province-wide controlled strike (i.e. withdrawal of certain services) in the middle of April, 2014; proceeded to rotating strikes in mid-May; and culminated in a province-wide full withdrawal of work by teachers in mid-June. In September, the strike ended with the parties signing a new collective agreement. Between February and June 2014, through email, the president asked teachers to vote in support of the above plan, and participate in each of its components (with the last one including an additional vote). Teachers endorsed that plan in large numbers, and executed each one of its parts.

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The importance of language in the creation, perpetuation, and conclusion of conflicts has been long established. In his preface to *At War with Words*, Billing (2003: xv) states that: "the words of war are central to the activity of war." Through language people are mobilized to take up arms and are prepared for sacrifice. Language "justifies inhumanity, absolves from guilt, and demonizes the enemy" (Nelson, 2003: 449). Other important structural factors can influence mobilization. For example, there must also be an organization with the resources necessary for action, a leadership ready and willing to coordinate and direct, supportive institutional arrangements, and a balance of power favourable to such action (McAdam, 1982; Klandermans, 1984; Kelly, 1998). Yet it is through language that leaders describe and delimit the conflict, devise and justify an action plan, and instill conviction and a will to act in individuals (Kelly, 1998).

Here, we focus on how Jim Iker used language to mobilize his members to collective action. We examine the topics, or places, the BCTF president visited to justify collective action and inspire agency. Depending on the situation, a speaker will consult different topics to create adherence, or a community of minds, with an audience. We survey the topics the president marshaled to develop his arguments, and discuss how he used them to construct a reality conducive to collective action. In what follows, we introduce our conceptual framework, provide a background for the case study, discuss the data and methodology, present our analysis, and examine our findings.

Importantly, this case study is based on a rhetorical analysis, which is different from discourse analysis where scholars examine discourse practices to decode relationships between language and ideology, power, and control. We explore how one union president mobilized language to persuade members to accept his theses and take action. Although we know that the members endorsed the president's calls to action, our methodology did not allow us to correlate his rhetoric with the members' actions.

Our research plan required data with the following qualities. First, the president's appeals to action should clearly address the members. Second, the appeals had to be delivered directly to the members rather than being mediated or interpreted, thus running the risk of distortion. Third, they had to be argumentative, that is emphasizing the importance of and reasons for collective action. Fourth, they had to comprise sufficient argumentative material to make the case study viable. Finally, we sought a conflict involving caregivers who may need an extra prompt to walk off the job and leave their charges without the appropriate level of care. Whereas we found such data, the size of the sample presented an obvious methodological drawback. Nonetheless, looking at a labour conflict through an unorthodox lens provides a novel contribution to the knowledge of one of the oldest topics in industrial relations research.

The New Rhetoric

To understand the importance of topics we turn to Chaim Perelman's new rhetoric. In fact, Perelman's new rhetoric is not all that new. Rather, it reclaims the Aristotelian view of rhetoric as a practical method of reasoning and persuasion based on opinion and probability. To revive rhetoric and substantiate its practical merit, Perelman developed a methodology of oratory he called the new rhetoric, or argumentation.

> An argumentation is always addressed by a person called the orator—whether by speech or in writing—to an audience of listeners. It aims at obtaining or reinforcing the adherence of the audience to some theses, assent to which is hoped for. The new rhetoric, like the old, seeks to persuade or convince, to obtain an adherence which may be *theoretical* to start with, although it may eventually be manifested through a disposition to act, or *practical*, as provoking either immediate action, the making of a decision, or a commitment to act (Perelman, 1979: 10-11; emphases in the original).

Thus, rhetors seek adherence with their listeners about appropriate thoughts and actions. The new rhetoric provides orators with a compendium of methods for securing adherence. This, in turn, renders rhetoric practical, applicable and omnipresent. It occupies that massive space between what is self-evident and/or measurable and what is arbitrary. According to Perelman (1979: 31), "if the rational is restricted to the field of calculation, measuring and weighing, the reasonable is left with the vast field of all that is not amenable to quantitative and formal techniques. This field … lies open for investigation by the new rhetoric." Rhetoric is valuable and practical when people make decisions without reference to exact measures, specific rules, or laws; debate matters that do not fall under any discrete area of expertise and can be resolved variously; are not interested in long and detailed examinations; and can exercise their judgment when addressed by a speaker (Garsten, 2006: 115 and 132).

To recap, the new rhetoric, or argumentation, does not deal with what is certain, or can be proven beyond doubt. Rather, it applies acceptable premises that yield probable conclusions. This is why the new rhetoric plays an important role when speakers try to provoke intellectual and/or physical action on the part of an audience and the discourse is about weighing pros and cons. Below, we outline the key components of argumentation.

The Audience

The importance of the audience in argumentation cannot be overemphasized. After all, argumentation is addressed to an audience, and is stylized and delivered to render that audience attentive and receptive to the speaker's agenda. Successful argumentation, therefore, requires a thorough understanding of the audience's

opinions and values. "The only general advice that a theory of argumentation can give," states Perelman (1982: 13), "is to ask speakers to adapt themselves to their audiences." And he clarifies that, "[t]o adapt to an audience is, above all, to choose as premises of argumentation theses the audience already holds" (*ibid*.: 23). The audience can be of three types: the single (self) as an audience, a particular audience, and a universal audience. The self can be an audience "when he deliberates or gives himself reasons for his actions" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969: 30). The success of argumentation aimed exclusively at a particular audience depends on how well the speaker knows that audience, its convictions and preferences. It is with this audience that our analysis is concerned.

Occasionally, however, speakers address an audience that cannot be easily reduced to a single particular group. How then should a speaker induce adherence? Perelman addresses this conundrum by introducing his notion of the universal audience. A rhetorician who attempts to foster the adherence of an audience while addressing a multiplicity of onlookers, such as a newspaper readership or a legislature, must first reduce those multiple minds to a singular, universal audience which is: "the totality of beings capable of reason" (Perelman, 1963: 155). This totality then becomes a private case of a particular audience. Regardless of the type of audience, the speaker's goal is to enhance the audience's adherence to his arguments. The mechanics of this process are discussed briefly below.

Adherence

The purpose of rhetoric is to compel an audience to embrace the theses offered by a speaker; that is, to encourage an audience's adherence to, or acceptance of, a speaker's agenda. For Perelman, argumentation establishes a link by which acceptance passes from one argument to another, from accepted early premises to more controversial notions and conclusions (1982: 21; 1979: 18-19; 1963: 169). Thus, argumentation presupposes that those to whom a thesis is addressed first agree on a number of initial premises. This preliminary agreement should prime the audience to accept further, possibly more contentious, arguments. The search for an audience's initial bases of agreement and subsequent attempts to connect them to more contentious conclusions is the challenge faced by any speaker (Perelman, 1968: 20). The creation of presence is a powerful linguistic strategy for establishing preliminary bases of agreement with an audience.

Presence

"[A]ll argumentation is selective. It chooses the elements and the method of making them present" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969: 119). Naturally, speakers frame, or interpret, situations in a manner that increases the likelihood of the listeners' adherence to their agenda. For Perelman, effective speakers

create presence, which is: "the displaying of certain elements on which the speaker wishes to center attention in order that they occupy the foreground of the hearer's consciousness" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969: 142). In any situation, an audience is exposed to a spectrum of opinions, beliefs, and views. From this cacophony, the speaker should isolate and amplify a few chords on which to focus attention by endowing them with meaning (Perelman, 1979: 17). The speaker, thus, "gives the mind a certain orientation" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969: 142) by constructing a simplified and coherent context through the purposeful selection of facts, values, and presumptions (Edelman, 1988: 103).

Through presence, speakers establish meaning, sharpen images, construct truth, and dispel doubt and hesitation. It is a testament that "language does not mirror an objective 'reality,' but rather creates it by organizing meaningful perceptions abstracted from a complex, bewildering world" (Edelman, 1971: 66). To be effective, appropriate "objects of agreement" should bolster presence.

Objects of Agreement

Objects of agreement are the foundations of arguments (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969: 65). They are the elements a speaker should use to foster an audience's adherence to a presence. A rhetor can utilize an assortment of concrete and abstract objects of agreement for that purpose (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969: 65-99; Perelman, 1979: 15-16). Concrete objects include facts, truths, and presumptions, whereas abstract objects comprise values, value hierarchies, and preferences that are also known as topics, topoi, or commonplaces. Facts and truths are objects that are already agreed upon and are therefore accepted by the audience. Facts are "objects of precise, limited agreement, whereas the term 'truths' is preferably applied to more complex systems relating to connections between facts" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969: 68-69). Presumptions are widely accepted opinions, or conventions, that need not be proven. Values influence people's actions by distinguishing between right and wrong. They point to actions that 'if you have been in our shoes, you would most likely do the same.' Values, however, do not command an equal degree of moral authority. For example, freedom of speech is likely secondary to anti-defamation, justice, and fairness; hence the importance of value hierarchies.

Objects of general agreement are called loci, places, commonplaces, topoi, or topics and are at the centre of this study (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969: 83-85; Perelman, 1979: 16). There is no agreement on the exact nature of topics or on how they function. In *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle explains that: "a topic [is a heading] under which many enthymemes [rhetorical arguments] fall"

(Kennedy, 2007: 192). Similarly, we view topics as sources of general arguments from which arguments for a particular subject or occurrence are derived (Corbett and Connors, 1999: 19).

For Perelman, a topic is a category under which arguments of the same type are arranged; hence, his notion that topics are "storehouses for arguments" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969: 83). They prompt a speaker to discover "that which is relevant and persuasive in particular situations" (Consigny, 1974: 181). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca emphasize that a speaker must consult topics when seeking to persuade an audience to think or behave in a particular manner. Topics "form an indispensable arsenal on which a person wishing to persuade another will have to draw, whether he likes it or not" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969: 84). In short, a topic is a place (in one's memory) to which one resorts to persuade someone on a given subject.

Our study asks three questions. First, which topics did the BCTF president use to mobilize his members to collective action? Second, given the number of topics that can be used in a given situation, why did the president choose these topics? Third, how did he apply the chosen topics to achieve adherence with his members? How did he render collective action the one best way to counteract the government and BCPSEA and aim to persuade teachers to execute it?

Background

The events described below stem from what occurred between 2001, when Gordon Campbell led his Liberal Party to a landslide victory in the provincial elections, and 2012 when the teachers voted to accept a new, mediated contract. For a review of the chaotic government-BCTF relations during that period see Reshef and Keim (2016). The bargaining round that began in early 2013 raised hope for a new beginning in the troubled BCTF-government relationship. Premier Christy Clark proposed changes to teacher bargaining that included tying salary increases to those negotiated by a handful of public sector employees, such as nurses and college faculty, and a 10-year agreement that would bring stability to the turbulent education system. In January 2013, the government published a framework for the new bargaining process (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2013). It included a detailed timeline and prescribed mediation without recommendations, and then conciliation with recommendations in case of an impasse. Exhausting these options, the BCTF could then commence a strike in the summer, which might postpone the start of the new school year.

At the end of July, the Minister of Education appointed Michael Marchbank to assume the responsibilities of the elected board of the BCPSEA, thus suspend-

ing the legal role of the BCPSEA in this bargaining process. Marchbank was a long-time public sector executive and, at the time of his appointment, CEO of the Health Employers' Association of BC (the counterpart to BCPSEA in the health sector). That step might have signalled the government's commitment to a new bargaining approach, since instead of being a "ghost at the bargaining table" (Swimmer and Thompson, 1996: 6), it had now become a direct negotiator. Unfortunately, the parties soon discovered the difficulty of making history in the shadow of their troubled past. While the parties negotiated within a framework emphasizing creativity, accommodation and long-term stability, they became embroiled in a bitter legal dispute that centred on the constitutionality of *Bill 22*.

On March 15, 2012, the government passed *Bill 22, Education Improvement Act*. Among other things, it brought in a government-appointed mediator. The mediator was prohibited from considering staffing levels and class size and composition, items that had been unilaterally stripped from the teachers' contract in 2002 and should have been restored to the bargaining table following a 2011 BC Supreme Court decision (*British Columbia Teachers' Federation v. British Columbia*, 2011). Importantly, that decision was in step with a 2007 Supreme Court of Canada decision that declared that collective bargaining was protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Health Services and Support… v. British Columbia*, 2007; for a brief context, see the preamble of the ruling). According to *Bill 22*, the above items would become negotiable in the 2013 bargaining round.

In late 2013, the parties found themselves in the courtroom of Justice Susan Griffin, the same judge who issued the 2011 BC Supreme Court decision. The union argued that *Bill 22* was unconstitutional because it banned negotiation over staffing levels and class size and composition until the current agreement expired in June 2013. It sought a reinstatement of these items (as per the 2011 BC Supreme Court ruling) and unspecified damages. In January 2014, Justice Griffin ruled that the government must pay the BCTF $2 million in damages, retroactively restore staffing levels, and class size and composition language. Griffin found that the government did not bargain in good faith after her 2011 ruling:

> One of the problems was that the government representatives were pre-occupied by another strategy. Their strategy was to put such pressure on the union that it would provoke a strike by the union. The government representatives thought this would give government the opportunity to gain political support for imposing legislation on the union (Summary, *British Columbia Teachers' Federation v. British Columbia*, 2014).

Thus, the BC government had not just trampled the *Charter rights* of the teachers for the past 12 years, but under Clark it had done so to manufacture a failure in collective bargaining for political gain in the 2013 provincial elections.

Now Premier Clark had significantly less clout to persuade the BCTF that her government wished to bargain in good faith. The union had no reason to trust the government, and it had a BC Supreme Court judge's ruling to confirm its suspicions. That the government quickly announced its intention to appeal the ruling did not help. In April 2015, the BC Court of Appeal backed the government in its appeal and overturned the Griffin decision, a ruling the union promptly appealed (*British Columbia Teachers' Federation v. British Columbia*, 2015). In November 2016, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in favour of the teachers, overturning the 2015 BC Court of Appeal decision and reinstating the 2014 Griffin decision (*British Columbia Teachers' Federation v. British Columbia*, 2016). Thus the parties, who had tried to revamp their relationship, found themselves in the familiar territory of confrontation and enmity that, presumably, rendered the prospects for a negotiated agreement dim and prompted the following.

On February 28, 2014, the BCTF president emailed a call to action entitled, "Fair Deal for Teachers: Better Support for Kids". In this communiqué, Iker asked teachers to vote on a three-phase action plan. Eighty-nine percent of those voting supported his appeal (Sherlock, 2014). Phase one was not intended to disrupt the classrooms. Using a controlled province-wide strike, teachers would refrain from providing certain services, such as supervising students outside of regularly scheduled classes, or attending any meetings with management. Barring significant progress toward a negotiated agreement, collective action would escalate into phase two—rotating strikes. Each local union would fully withdraw services one full day each week. At the same time, stage one would continue on days that school was in session. On May 26, Iker emailed another call to action, "Keep Calm and Carry on", calling upon his members to participate in the rotating strikes, a call teachers promptly answered. The government did not pull its punches. On the day the union launched the rotating strikes, it implemented a partial lockout. The teachers could not come to work more than 45 minutes before classes started or stay later than 45 minutes after classes ended, except for an urgent safety issue.

According to Iker's plan, without progress at the bargaining table, collective action would proceed to phase three—a province-wide strike that would require a vote of the membership. On June 4 and 5, Iker asked the teachers: "Are you in favour of escalating job action up to and including a full withdrawal of services?" His messages were entitled: "It's Time to Vote", and "Standing Up for Ourselves, Standing Up for Our Students". Of those voting, 86% were in favour of an all-out strike (BCTF, 2014). A full-scale strike began on June 17, 2014. The strike ended on September 18, with 86 percent of the teachers who cast ballots voting in favour of the new collective agreement recommended by the union leadership.

Data and Findings

We analyzed the calls to action to identify the topics the BCTF president used to inspire action in his members. We explored the data independently. After several iterations, we converged on the following topics:

1. Urgency to sign an agreement—getting a negotiated deal was the main objective of the BCTF. The union sought to avoid a legislated or mediated agreement that would likely undercut its interests, which had occurred preciously;
2. Fairness of the agreement—it was not enough to sign just any deal. The final agreement had to be fair and reasonable to various stakeholders, and consistent with the Griffin 2011 ruling;
3. Futility of the bargaining process—the government and BCPSEA did not intend to conclude a fair deal, hence the need for collective action;
4. Agency—the conviction that acting together made achieving the union goal possible and probable;
5. Integrity—taking action was every teacher's moral and professional duty.

We then parsed the data according to these five topics. We sorted the material independently, conducting several iterations until we achieved conversion. When we could not agree on how to classify a particular text, we excluded it from our analysis. We present the results below. To save space, we provide 3-4 examples for each topic. In these examples, information in square brackets is ours. In the consequent analyses, unreferenced quotes indicate excerpts from the examples.

Urgency to Sign an Agreement

For a union, the utilitarian value of a negotiated collective agreement cannot be overemphasized—it is a union's *raison d'être*, "the very thing that unions are about" (Kumar and Downie, 1995: 7). A union's ability to negotiate an agreement and adhere to its provisions is its foremost mechanism for protecting and promoting working conditions. In 2000, the Ontario Health Services Restructuring Commission (2000: 88) acknowledged this truism, conceding that: "unions and their members considered their current collective agreements as sacrosanct …" Not surprisingly, the topic of the urgency of a negotiated deal figured prominently in the union president's rhetoric:

> We need government to understand that teachers are serious about getting an agreement. They need to start getting serious, too. We have been at the table for over a year and for more than 40 sessions.
>
> The time has come to apply more pressure to the negotiation table. If we're going to move this government and BCPSEA off their unfair and unreasonable demands, we need to be able to exert the maximum pressure possible.

> Despite all of our efforts to be patient and secure a fair and reasonable deal, this government and employer have only driven us further apart over the last few months. That's why we need a strong mandate, to tell the employer that we're serious about getting a deal.

This topic conveyed the union's sense of urgency, the injustice it faced and its frustration with being unable to sign an agreement. The union sought a negotiated agreement, and was serious about getting one. "That's why we need a strong mandate, to tell the employer that we're serious about getting a deal." It expected the government to "start getting serious too." Given the BCTF's sobering history (Fleming, 2011: 52-94; Reshef and Keim, 2014: 43-71), it may well have wished to avoid the likely alternative to a negotiated agreement, a legislated or mediated deal. However, despite patiently spending over a year at the bargaining table, the union had not been taken seriously. In fact, the government and employer kept tabling unfair and unreasonable proposals; thus, a negotiated deal eluded the union.

With this topic, the president sought to convince members, and perhaps other stakeholders, that the union was serious about concluding a negotiated deal and was ready "to apply more pressure to the negotiation table" for that purpose. Whereas the president did not mention what kind of pressure he had in mind, this topic might have primed members for arguments about the inevitability of collective action as the only means left for securing an agreement.

Fairness of the Agreement

Securing a negotiated agreement was necessary but insufficient justification for collective action. The future agreement must be fair and reasonable, barring concessions and honouring the 2011 BC Supreme Court decision. To reach such an agreement, the government and BCPSEA must remove their unfair proposals from the table. For Iker, this might have been a prerequisite for avoiding collective action:

> On the matter of concessions, the employer is demanding to take over control of the school calendar (bypassing our work year provisions in the collective agreement), strip any due process from evaluations, cut back on sick days, and have administrators decide whether harassment of a teacher by an administrator has occurred. Most egregious is that the employer tabled language, two weeks after our BC Supreme Court win, to once again remove any language on class size, class composition, and staffing levels for specialist teachers.
>
> They need to remove their unfair proposals and provide some sort of incentive for teachers [to sign an agreement].
>
> While Premier Christy Clark and Education Minister Peter Fassbender were talking about "labour peace" in public, the employer's negotiator was tabling unfair and un-

> reasonable proposals. That deliberate contradiction could not go unanswered, and is one of the key reasons we went public with our intention to hold the [strike] vote.
>
> Next week you along with tens of thousands of other teachers across our province will have a chance to cast your ballot in the strike vote. It's a chance to make a statement, have your voice heard, and help the BCTF bargaining team secure a fair deal.

Apparently, in public, the Premier and Education Minister were talking the talk. However, in practice, they were "tabling unfair and unreasonable proposals" that "could not go unanswered." The president called their bluff, and concluded that without the threat of a strike, the chance of securing a fair deal was slim and fading. Without fairness at the bargaining table, there could be no acceptable deal, hence the need for collective action that would "help the BCTF bargaining team secure a fair deal".

This topic realized several functions. Fairness meant that union members should receive what they rightfully deserved. Fairness, thus, was the expected value of a satisfactory agreement: "A *value* is an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence" (Rokeach, 1973: 5. Emphasis in the original). Values are distinguished by their "ought" character that endows them with moral influence and a central role in public debate and outlook (Rokeach, 1973; Provis, 1996). Thus, the agreement the union sought was more than a regulatory instrument with specific goals and expected effects. It ought to be a fair agreement delivering what rightfully belonged to the teachers.

The quest for fairness likely transformed the pursuit of a utility into an ideal. Action mobilization arguments expressed in terms of values identify, or imply, universal motives that should be publicly endorsed. According to the *2011 Canadian Index of Wellbeing* (CIW), fairness is one of nine core consensus values that inform Canadians' behaviour. Pursuing a fair agreement was therefore an admirable act, which legitimized and justified teacher participation in collective action, and encouraged public support. Moreover, as a virtue, fairness distinguished between "us" and "them." "Them," the government and BCPSEA, were bullies who would do whatever they could to deny "us" our Charter-protected right to negotiate a fair agreement. Thus, fairness assigned the actors identities and roles, which we revisit later.

Futility of the Bargaining Process

Whereas a negotiated fair deal was the union goal, the president's rhetoric suggested that collective bargaining could no longer produce that coveted outcome. The government and employer did not intend to reach an agreement that would heed union interests. Consequently, as we show later, the union must

use collective action to pressure its recalcitrant adversaries to accept such an agreement:

> They have also stated that they would never agree to [incorporate] class-size and composition limits and minimum levels of specialist teachers into the collective agreement. It showed total disrespect for the law, for teachers, and for students.
>
> We have been very patient, hoping to give government the space it needed to come to the table with reasonable proposals, and funding required to settle a deal that would be fair to teachers and give our students more support. But since BCPSEA's board was dismissed and replaced with a government appointed director and negotiator, the two parties have been driven further and further apart.
>
> Despite this understanding and support [from the general public], the government remains entrenched and unwilling to move on key issues. Yesterday we reduced our salary proposal as part of a series of significant moves at the bargaining table, but the government responded with nothing.
>
> […] the employer has not moved on the salary offer since April. The current offer would see teachers take two more years of zeros after coming off two years of legislated zeros. Instead of focusing on solutions the last two weeks, the government raced ahead with their ill-conceived and chaotic lockout [recall, BCPSEA lockout the teachers in May, 2014].

After more than a year of negotiations, the parties had reached an impasse. Whereas the union was cooperative, BCPSEA and the government were not. The union had demonstrated responsibility and patience at the bargaining table; it was forthcoming and helpful. Yet its counterparts were unfair and unreasonable; they showed "total disrespect for the law, for teachers, and for students," and were stubbornly "entrenched and unwilling to move on key issues." As such, they "would never agree to [incorporate] class-size and composition limits and minimum levels of specialist teachers into the collective agreement," despite the recent court decision. In fact, "instead of focusing on solutions" they had escalated the situation by racing "ahead with their ill-conceived and chaotic lockout."

This topic highlighted the weakness of the bargaining process and placed the blame for the situation squarely on a "government [that] remains entrenched and unwilling to move on key issues." Consequently, "the two parties have been driven further and further apart." It thus paved the way for considering collective action the exclusive means for reaching a negotiated agreement. Barring such action, experience showed that the union would likely be *force-fed* a biased, legislated or mediated agreement.

Agency

"To act collectively, people must believe that such action would be efficacious, i.e., that change is possible but that it will not happen automatically, without

collective action" (Oliver, 1989: 14). This is why "optimism about the outcome of a collective challenge will … enhance the probability of participation; pessimism will diminish it" (Snow *et al.*, 1986: 470). In industrial relations, union effectiveness, or instrumentality, has been recognized as the main reason for joining a union (Clark, 2009; Barling, Fullagar and Kelloway, 1992). Individuals are especially concerned about the union's ability to address their workplace interests. Presumably, willingness to participate in the BCTF collective action was, at least in part, a function of the expectation that collective action would enable the union to secure a fair deal:

> By voting YES on this vote, you will give your bargaining team a stronger voice at the table. A strong strike mandate will put pressure on both sides to find a deal. That's what we need. Job action is never easy. But voting YES will empower all of us to stand stronger together in solidarity, show pride in our profession, and advocate for our students [emphasis in the original].
>
> I believe that if we stand strong together we will get a deal that is fair to us and most importantly increases support for our students.
>
> Next week you along with tens of thousands of other teachers across our province will have a chance to cast your ballot in the strike vote. It's a chance to make a statement, have your voice heard, and help the BCTF bargaining team secure a fair deal.
>
> Our unity and the growing support of parents and the public will help bring a fair deal into reach. You have done an incredible job of getting the message out. Your passionate stories about your students and day-to-day life in classrooms illustrate how 12 years of underfunding is undermining public education. As they have done every time, government is once again underestimating the resolve of BC's public school teachers and trying to create disunity.

The president used the topic of agency to inspire a will to act, especially among the skeptics who needed their doubts allayed. The bargaining process was anemic, hence union efficacy depended on collective action. This is why "a strong strike mandate will put pressure on both sides to find a deal." In addition, teachers' support would give their bargaining team "… a stronger voice at the table." This, in turn, would improve the odds of securing a deal "… that is fair to us and most importantly increases support for our students." Member participation was key to enhancing the union's position vis-à-vis its opponents.

Iker tried to dispel potential doubts and fears, inspire conviction and optimism in the positive outcomes of participation, and arouse belief in the value of his action plan. He acknowledged that "[j]ob action is never easy," yet, he reassured everyone that "voting YES will empower all of us." Furthermore, he informed teachers that they were not alone in their struggle. Parents and the public were on their side and support was growing, since they appreciated the teachers'

resolve to improve the underfunded education system, a fight that nobody else was likely ready, or able, to take on. In short, the president demonstrated unwavering confidence in the merit of teacher participation, which would give every teacher "a chance to make a statement, have your voice heard … show pride in our profession, and advocate for our students." Together, the teachers' action would render their union more credible and powerful, and therefore more likely to secure a fair negotiated agreement.

Integrity

A sense of integrity, or a moral duty to act, inspires action among supporters and adherents (Tyler and McGraw, 1983; Turner and Killian, 1972; Reshef and Keim, 2014). Benford (1993: 206) adds that: "while a principle of responsibility is perhaps widely shared, there is a considerable variability across individuals regarding the problems to which people feel obligated to respond." Without integrity, mobilization efforts might stop at the consensus building stage, resulting in widespread free riding (Benford, 1993). Using utterances like those below, the president argued that every teacher had a moral duty to act:

> The BCTF remains committed to getting a fair deal for teachers, and better support for kids—and it is our collective efforts, including the amazing work that you do every day, that will get us there.
>
> Almost 45% of the members of the BCTF were too young to be teaching in 2002, when then Education Minister Christy Clark stripped our collective agreement. Many were still students in 2005, when teachers courageously defied the BC Liberals and went on strike for two weeks. You've probably heard the stories, but you don't have any direct experience of teaching in smaller classes or of being able to rely on adequate support from specialist colleagues. It wasn't always as difficult as it is today. And, we know it's so hard to meet all our students' needs that many young teachers are leaving the profession. That's just one more reason why we need to take this collective action.
>
> Nobody ever went on strike saying, 'I am happy to lose money.' Regardless of whether they are public or private sector workers, people go on strike because they want to better themselves and their working conditions. In our situation, we are standing up for the most basic right of every child to receive the education they deserve. We are standing up for ourselves and saying no to more years of zeroes. We are standing up for an unfair and unreasonable government that wants us to forfeit any decision making regarding class size and composition and disrespects us by imposing partial lockouts and by docking our pay by 10%. We are standing up to a government that wants us to accept concessions.

The rhetoric aligned the value of teaching, as a profession, with collective action; confrontation was now a professional obligation. Protecting students, caring for the future of younger teachers, improving deteriorating working and

learning conditions, and standing up to an unfair and unreasonable government are utilities. Yet, they are also ethical imperatives; they are what conscientious teachers ought to stand for and ethical stakeholders support. The arguments presented collective action as the means for fulfilling these invaluable teacher obligations, thus framing defiance as a noble act. Consequently, those enacting the struggle occupied the moral high ground, which might have inspired teachers to act and others to side with them.

Distinguishing between honourable and principled teachers and a villainous government and employer was a clear, straightforward message. However, it was not simplistic. It implied that, first, those who did not support the struggle were on the wrong side of the moral fence; and second, the more honourable party would not hesitate to take on its more powerful adversary, hopefully earning David public admiration and Goliath scorn and disdain. The president might have rendered collective action more palatable by arguing that it was a worthy effort. His skeptics and doubters might find comfort and reassurance in arguments that painted collective action as the commendable act of caring professionals. Agreeing that teachers should stand "up for the most basic right of every child to receive the education they deserve," or that they should defy "a government that wants us to accept concessions," likely primed the teachers to accept the less agreeable proposition that this is "why we need to take this collective action."

Discussion and Conclusions

We argue that to mobilize his members to act collectively, the BCTF president crafted arguments by visiting five topics—urgency, fairness, futility, agency, and integrity. The first three promoted a utilitarian logic for collective action. They established that: a- union urge to secure a negotiated fair deal; b- fading potency of the bargaining process due to an intransigent opponent that sapped the process of its vitality; and c- exclusivity of collective action as the foremost means of getting *a* given *b*. Together, these three topics answered such questions as: "What is our goal?"; "Do we really need collective action?" Simultaneously, they avoided more open-ended questions such as: "What is our ultimate purpose?"; "How should we proceed?"

Even if teachers accepted the above message: "just because people agree with the … contention that a problem exists, does not guarantee that they will drop everything in their lives and work on alleviating the problem" (Benford, 1993: 201). Prompting teachers to act in concert was the objective of the last two topics—agency and integrity. They comprised an emotional and ethical appeal that rendered collective action a virtue; a negotiated agreement was the teachers' rightful entitlement; and success was highly likely. The relevant arguments aimed to assuage possible qualms such as: "Can we take on the

government and succeed?"; "Can we afford the moral cost of participation?"; "Are we doing the right thing?" The rhetoric aimed to empower the teachers by reassuring them that defending the defenseless was commendable, that their struggle was just and fair, and that collectively they would not be ignored and nor would they fail. Thus, the president supplied them with a moral license, an obligation, and a conviction to act.

In terms of our analytical framework, president Iker sought a presence whereby an honourable "us" fought a despicable "them" for what teachers justly deserved, and for the benefit of the education system and the community. It likely helped that Iker was addressing an audience that he knew well. Therefore, his message might have been what the majority expected. Skeptics, however, might have considered job action a breach of an unwritten contract they had "signed" with students and parents upon entering the profession. Teachers are expected to care for their charges in the classroom rather than on the picket line, withdrawing services they monopolize. Others might have been reluctant to take on the powerful government. To assuage them, Iker constructed objects of agreement to connect the need to save education from the government clutches by acting in unison with the likely less appealing idea of collective action. The use of topics for that purpose has been the focus of our study.

Iker's rhetoric might have targeted more than mobilization. First, "organizations … anticipate and plan for the development of rhetorical situations and employ discourse strategically to influence" them (Cheney *et al.*, 2004: 87). Perhaps Iker foresaw rhetorical situations that could damage the union's reputation. The BCTF could be criticized, from within and without, for misusing its monopolistic power to promote teachers' self-interests. By focusing on broader issues, such as improving the quality of the education system, protecting "the kids," and defending the teaching profession, Iker might have preempted such critiques. Second, we have surmised that the president's rhetoric used urgency to avoid a legislated or mediated agreement. The notion that a negotiated agreement is a union's *raison d'être* is not new. Yet, what seems natural and ordinary in fact relies on constant reinforcement (Cheney *et al.*, 2004: 89), in this case to condemn "permanent exceptionalism" (Panitch and Swartz, 1988: 16) in which government removes legislated bargaining rights. Thus, Iker might have sought to manage the regulatory and political environment his union faced. Finally, he constructed the current rhetorical situation to portray the BCTF as an unselfish and noble organization, which contrasted with his pejorative view of the government.

In summary, this study focuses on the topics, or places Jim Iker, a union president, visited to achieve adherence with his members and inspire them to confront the government. Thus, we look at labour conflict through the rhetoric

Iker mobilized to define and animate the conflict, and construct a space that teachers might inhabit. We demonstrate how Iker created identities, assigned roles, and outlined relationships to convince members to embrace his plan. Iker's presidential role likely offered a broad repertoire of linguistic resources for mobilizing members to collective action. The case study approach, however, limits our ability to consider the typicality of our findings and prevents us from relating Iker's rhetoric to subsequent member behaviours. Future research should address these lacunae.

In the words of Richard McKeon: "It is easy to find things if their places are pointed out and marked, and, in like fashion, if we wish to track down an argument we should know places" (Bloom, 1977: 375). In tracking down a union president's arguments, we have identified the five places that were the sources of those arguments. Generally then, facing a particular situation, union leaders seeking their members' adherence through language would benefit from identifying key topics. Then they should be more likely to develop arguments that are convincing enough to secure a community of minds, and sufficiently compelling to provoke action.

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SUMMARY

Topics a Union President Visited to Mobilize Members

We analyze four calls to action issued by the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) president, Jim Iker. These appeals sought to mobilize members during the 2013-2014 collective bargaining that pitted the BCTF against the British Columbia government and the direct employer, the British Columbia Public School Employers' Association. We apply a "theory of rhetoric" developed by Chaim Perelman to locate and analyze the topics the BCTF president used to persuade his members to adhere to his arguments about the merit of collective action.

We argue that the president constructed his rhetoric by visiting five topics—urgency, fairness, futility, agency, and integrity. The first three promoted a utilitarian logic for collective action. Iker used them to persuade teachers, and other stakeholders, that collective action was necessary for addressing the problem—the futility of the bargaining process to produce a negotiated fair agreement due to the government's reluctance to bargain in good faith. The last two topics—agency and integrity—comprised a rhetoric of comfort and reassurance offering an affective logic for acting collectively. At least some union members, as well as other stakeholders, might have felt that teachers are expected to care for their charges in the classroom rather than on the picket line, by withdrawing services they monopolize. Iker used the topics of agency and integrity to remind everyone that defending students, young teachers, the teaching profession, and

the education system was commendable, and reassured them that collectively they would not be ignored and nor would they fail.

In short, we have pointed out five topics that the president visited to mobilize his members to collective action. They highlight a unique rhetoric that aimed to persuade teachers to become agents of protest. Our case study methodology did not allow us to generalize our findings, which more research is, thus, needed to corroborate.

KEYWORDS: rhetoric, labour conflict, teachers, collective action, government.

RÉSUMÉ

Thèmes traités par un président de centrale syndicale afin de mobiliser ses membres

Dans cet article, nous analysons quatre appels à l'action collective lancés par Jim Iker, président de la Fédération des enseignants de la Colombie-Britannique (FECB). Ces appels visaient à mobiliser les membres lors de la négociation collective de 2013-2014, laquelle opposait la FECB au gouvernement de la Colombie-Britannique et à l'employeur direct, l'Association des employeurs des écoles publiques de Colombie-Britannique. Pour y parvenir, nous utilisons une « théorie de la rhétorique » développée par Chaim Perelman afin d'identifier et d'analyser les thèmes que le président de la FTCB a utilisés pour convaincre ses membres d'adhérer à ses arguments sur le mérite de l'action collective.

Nous soutenons que le président a élaboré sa rhétorique à partir des cinq thèmes suivants : l'urgence d'agir, l'équité, la futilité, la nécessité de l'action et l'intégrité. Les trois premiers s'appuyaient sur une logique utilitaire en faveur de l'action collective. Iker les a utilisés dans le but de persuader les enseignants et les autres parties prenantes à la négociation que l'action collective était devenue nécessaire afin de s'attaquer au problème principal, soit la futilité du processus de négociation visant à parvenir à un accord négocié, cela en raison de la réticence du gouvernement à négocier de bonne foi. Les deux derniers thèmes, l'action et l'intégrité, comportaient une rhétorique de réconfort et de réassurance offrant une logique affective pour agir collectivement. Certains syndiqués, de même que d'autres intervenants, auraient pu penser que les enseignants devraient d'abord se consacrer à leur tâche dans leur salle de classe, plutôt que de se retrouver sur un piquet de grève, retirant ainsi la prestation d'un service dont ils détiennent le monopole. Iker a alors utilisé les thèmes de l'importance d'agir et de l'intégrité pour rappeler à chacun et à chacune que défendre les étudiants, les jeunes enseignants, tout comme la profession enseignante et le système d'éducation, était incontournable. Il les a également rassurés en faisant valoir que, collectivement, ils ne seront pas ignorés et qu'ils n'échoueront pas.

En bref, nous avons identifié cinq thèmes que le président a soulevés dans le but d'entraîner ses membres à agir collectivement. Ces thèmes mettent en évidence

une rhétorique unique visant à persuader les enseignants à devenir des agents de protestation. Toutefois, notre méthodologie d'étude de cas ne nous permet pas de généraliser ces résultats, car davantage de recherches seront nécessaires afin de les corroborer.

MOTS-CLÉS : rhétorique, conflit de travail, enseignants, action collective, gouvernement.

RESUMEN

Temas abordados por un presidente sindical para movilizar a sus miembros

Se analizan cuatro llamados a la acción efectuados por el presidente la Federación de profesores de Colombia Británica (*British Columbia Teachers' Federation - BCTF*), Jim Iker. Estos llamados buscaban movilizar los miembros durante la negociación colectiva 2013-2014 que enfrentó la BCTF contra el gobierno de la provincia de Colombia Británica y su empleador directo, la Asociación de Empleadores del Sector Público de Colombia Británica. Aplicamos una « teoría de retórica » desarrollada por Chaim Perelman para establecer y analizar los temas que el presidente de la BCTF utilizó con miras a persuadir sus miembros de adherir a sus argumentos sobre el mérito de la acción colectiva.

Se argumenta que el presidente construyó su retórica abordando cinco temas — urgencia, justicia, futilidad, capacidad de actuar e integridad. Los primeros tres promovían una lógica utilitarista para la acción colectiva. Iker los utilizó para persuadir los profesores y otras partes interesadas que la acción colectiva era necesaria para resolver el problema mostrando, por ejemplo, la futilidad del proceso de negociación para producir un acuerdo justo negociado debido a la reticencia del gobierno para negociar de buena fe. Los dos últimos temas — capacidad de actuar e integridad — comprenden una retórica de confortación y seguridad ofreciendo así una lógica afectiva para actuar colectivamente. Al menos algunos miembros del sindicato, así como otras partes interesadas, pudieron haber sentido la expectativa que los profesores se ocupen de sus cargos en el aula en lugar de hacer los piquetes sindicales, impidiendo los servicios que ellos monopolizan. Iker utilizó los temas de capacidad de actuar e integridad para recordarles a todos que la defensa de los estudiantes, de los profesores jóvenes, de la profesión docente y del sistema de educación era encomiable, y los reaseguró que colectivamente no serían ignorados ni tampoco fallarían.

En resumen, hemos identificado cinco temas que el presidente abordó para movilizar a sus miembros hacia la acción colectiva. Se destaca una retórica única que buscaba persuadir a los profesores para que se conviertan en agentes de protesta. Nuestra metodología de estudio de caso no nos permite de generalizar nuestros resultados, los cuales requieren de otras investigaciones para corroborarlos.

PALABRAS CLAVES: retorica, conflicto laboral, profesores, acción colectiva, gobierno.