

BCTF Media Campaign: “Wear Black Day” on January 28, 2013

To mark the 11th anniversary of Bills 27 and 28, the BC Teachers’ Federation (BCTF) is organizing a protest for Monday, January 28, 2013, which they are calling a “Wear Black Day.”. The BCTF is asking teachers to mark the occasion by wearing black in their classrooms, and have supplied local teachers’ associations with buttons, t-shirts, etc.

Background on Political Messages in Schools

As reported in BCPSEA [@issue No. 2011-18](#) on October 30, 2011, Arbitrator Mark Thompson issued an award confirming the BCPSEA position that students must be insulated from political messages in schools. In this case, Arbitrator Thompson determined that teachers may not post union political messages on school walls or wear union political buttons in the classroom — it is inappropriate to use the classroom to advance teachers’ political views. The BCTF has appealed this decision to the BC Court of Appeal, but at this time the decision is binding. This decision was built on the [award of Arbitrator Emily Burke](#) dated February 21, 2011, which dealt with the issue of a teacher wearing a black armband in class to protest the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA), and upheld the district’s directive to that teacher to remove and refrain from engaging the students in conversations about her political views on FSA.

Students Should be Insulated from Political Messages

These cases confirm that school districts have the responsibility and right to insulate students from political materials and political messages of teachers in the school setting. Teachers are obliged to maintain their professionalism and to foster an open and supportive environment, which may be undermined when teachers use the classroom to advance their political views. The role of the teacher is to educate students and not to advance their individual or union interests.

With respect to the protest planned for Monday, January 28, 2013, BCPSEA’s position is that teachers should not wear in the classroom buttons or t-shirts with political messages that may engage students in the teacher’s political views on Bills 27 and 28. If teachers wear attire with political messages in the presence of students, they should be reminded that this is not permitted under the arbitral jurisprudence and should be asked to remove it from the classroom.

Although the BCTF may intend that the wearing of black on Monday is itself a form of political protest, in our view the wearing of black by a teacher is not something that warrants employer action. However, regardless of the colour of attire worn, teachers should not engage students in discussion about their political views.

Questions

Please contact your BCPSEA [labour relations liaison](#) if you have any questions or concerns.