

THE FREE PRESS

OPINION

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"The theory of a free press is that the truth will emerge from free reporting and free discussion." Walter Lippman

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Walking the fine line

School District 57 support workers should think hard about where they're heading in their current contract negotiations. The 1,026 CUPE Local 3742 members taking a strike vote this weekend are being asked, as ever, to give their leadership a strong mandate to use as a bargaining tool with management. But it's unlikely that even a strong mandate from the rank and file will change management's position, given its financial constraints and the broad range of union demands.

Marilyn Hannah, president of Local 3742, says job security, pay equity, pension improvements, wages and benefits are among the major stumbling blocks that have led to an impasse in talks. What else is there?

For one, already assured that no union jobs or even hours will be lost to volunteers, CUPE now wants to have the right to approve the volunteers themselves. The union also asked the school board to guarantee current staffing levels for five years. This is highly unrealistic considering the vagaries of education ministry funding and fluctuating enrollment levels.

This has to be a strike issue for the school board, which has lost considerable control over its budget in recent years. If CUPE members take a hard line on this issue, they could be carrying picket signs for a long time.

Taxpayers can only hope that Ms. Hannah and her CUPE followers don't lose sight of the fact that public dollars are involved and that we're supplying them so our children can get the best education possible without interruptions such as unnecessary work disruptions.

Trade unions are an accepted and even a necessary part of our workplace culture. But a balance must be maintained between employees' rights to reasonable working conditions and management's need to run an efficient operation.

Judging from some of the CUPE demands, that balance in our school district is endangered.

If Ms. Hannah wants to run the school district, she should apply for the superintendent's job. In the meantime, she should represent her members diligently and responsibly. It's what we expect from school trustees and administrators, who are also being paid with our money.



Boone leaves sad legacy

Lois Boone walked the plank on Friday. She did not step down as the person in charge of running the Ministry of Children and Families, that will happen when Premier Ujjal Dosanjh shuffles her out of his cabinet this week. But

Boone made it easier for the new premier by announcing that she will not be seeking re-election when the New Democrats next head to the polls.

When Premier Dosanjh produces his first cabinet he will proclaim them as the team that will lead the party to victory during the next election; Boone's stepping down means that her ouster, which is a sure bet, will be played as being for the good of the party.

The reality is likely something quite different.

During her tenure as the representative of Prince George-Mount Robson, Boone has managed to stay out of trouble. As highways and municipal affairs minister, she plodded along and caused few waves. She wasn't a star, but she wasn't an embarrassment either. And having her at the cabinet table, along with Paul Ramsey, likely aided Prince George. In fact, former finance minister Andrew

she fails to remember that it was the Social Credit government that greenlighted UNBC and that the jail was a tad controversial, as the new one holds the exact same number of prisoners as the old one.

Boone, though, will be remembered for one thing: the mishandling of the Amanda Jean Simpson case, bringing the failures of the ministry right home to Prince George.

Only Glen Clark knows what possessed him to appoint Boone as the minister for Children and Families, an unusual position for someone of her disposition. The only known fact is that it has turned into a disaster.

The ministry is in disarray, the workers are stressed and Boone admits that the handling of Amanda's case was inadequate. It's sad that ineptness cost a little girl her life.

It cost some ministry staff their jobs and now Lois Boone is leaving, the latest casualty in the case. Worse, though, is that more details are emerging to suggest the initial indications of the ministry's failure were incomplete, that the breakdown was massive.

Boone is leaving, but her legacy will live on for years to come.



RUMOUR MILLS

Shane Mills

Petter once said Boone was an aggressive advocate for the north.

In declaring her retirement for public life after 14 years, Boone wants to be remembered for the good not the goofs. She points to UNBC, the new jail and the courthouse as tangible ways the NDP helped the city. Which is true, but

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