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## **Ambulance Service balks at talks**

VANCOUVER - Paramedics say two days of talks with the BC Ambulance Service went nowhere fast.

Ambulance Paramedics of BC, CUPE 873 president John Strohmaier said hopes for serious negotiations were dashed when the employer's bargaining team failed to present any concrete proposals and seemed not to have a mandate to negotiate. "They appeared ill-prepared to make any decisions at all.

"We came (to these talks) ready to negotiate – we brought our proposals and we were prepared to stay as long as it took to make some progress towards a contract settlement. Thursday was set aside for non-monetary items and Friday for money, and we have repeatedly said we would even accept interest arbitration. But it's not possible to negotiate when the other side has no power and nothing to say."

The talks came after weeks of work from CUPE BC president Barry O'Neill to get the employer back to the table. The province's 3,500 ambulance paramedics have been on strike since April 1 for faster emergency response times, better staffing levels, wage parity with other emergency responders and a multi-year contract. The paramedics continue to provide ambulance services under Essential Services.

Strohmaier said the union executive will now be touring the province talking to members about what steps to take next to pressure the provincial government to "get serious" and appoint an independent mediator to settle this dispute.

"The lack of action from the BC Ambulance Service and the Ministry of Health is a lack of respect for the public and for ambulance paramedics and the work that we do. What we want is the same respect that we show our patients every day."

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