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Paramedics - new talks for new deal

VANCOUVER —Representatives of the BC Ambulance Service agree with ambulance paramedics on one thing – that the provincial model is the only option for a viable and sustainable ambulance service in B.C.

The shared perspective came out at the first day of contact talks held today in Vancouver for a new collective agreement between the BCAS and CUPE 873, Ambulance Paramedics of BC.

On several occasions the provincial Liberal government has alluded to looking into “alternate delivery options for paramedics.”

CUPE 873 served notice on Dec. 1 to launch the talks for a new agreement to take effect after the current “contract” legislated by the Liberals expires on April 1, 2010.

Two more days of meetings have been slated for next week to discuss what the employer termed “broad conceptual issues” including scheduling, staffing, seniority and training and recruitment.

After protracted negotiations earlier this year, CUPE representatives say they are hopeful the employer’s bargaining team now has a mandate to negotiate a new contract.

The two sides were close to a deal when VANOC demanded the province end the seven-month legal strike by B.C.’s 3,500 ambulance paramedics to ensure the 2010 Games. The ensuing legislation, Bill 21, marked a shameful first in Canadian labour history – the first time a government legislated workers while they were in the middle of voting on a contract offer from that same government.

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