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Industrial inquiry skims ambulance issues

RICHMOND – The provincial government’s report on the BC Ambulance Service released today appears to live up to paramedics’ predictions that it would be of little practical use in addressing the complex and pressing issues facing deteriorating ambulance services.

The report was put together in eight weeks by former career bureaucrat Chris Trumpy without input from the Ambulance Paramedics of BC, CUPE 873, which represents the province’s 3,500 paramedics. The paramedics have been calling for an independent and comprehensive review of the ambulance service for the past four years.

The union declined to take part in what it considers to be a skewed, superficial brief designed to try to make legislating paramedics back to work (Bill 21) more palatable to the public and to introduce the threat of dismantling our province-wide ambulance service. The BC Liberals appointed the industrial inquiry commission on Nov. 19 with a mandate to produce a non-binding report by January 15.

CUPE 873 president John Strohmaier says the union is in the process of going over the report in detail but adds that “at first blush there appears to be very little new information - and some old information that is actually outdated.” Strohmaier points out that “in his introductory letter Trumpy admits the time provided did not permit a detailed review...”

“Even more telling is that the report only gives staff workload issues two paragraphs. This is a fundamental issue for the ambulance service, and even in those two paragraphs the report acknowledges that the only way to address staff workload issues is through increased resources.”

CUPE 873 director of education BJ Chute said “the problem with a government-sponsored report like this is obvious – the Liberals are already claiming that BC paramedics “are paid at the top end of paramedics across Canada.” But the figures do not factor in the 60 per cent of paramedics in BC who are part-time and make only \$2/hour on pager and \$10/hour on call at the station.”

Much of the report focuses on delivery models and Trumpy includes moving the service into existing health care organizations, downloading the service onto individual communities or the private, for-profit model. For the status quo, the report acknowledges that the public province-wide system provides “consistent service; province-wide standards for qualifications, dispatch, staffing, wages and terms of employment; and efficient deployment of services.

CUPE BC president Barry O’Neill says the report “appears to be exactly what the provincial government wanted – a quick glance at the serious problems facing our ambulance service mixed with the threat of dismantling it.”

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