



TEAMSTERS CANADA RAIL CONFERENCE DIVISION 320



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Subject: Organized Labour Rallies With BC Paramedics

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

For those of you following this issue, here is an update on the protest rally held on January 27th, in support of the BC Paramedics. Perhaps next rally TCRC Div 320 members could attend to show our support as well.

In Solidarity,

Murray Douglas
TCRC Div 320
S&C Officer

Bill 21 fight just beginning

With the sound system blaring songs like “Shout It Out Loud” and “We’re Not Going to Take It,” more than 250 activists rallying outside Burnaby City Hall today shouted a loud and clear message to the BC Liberal government: working people in B.C. are not going to take legislated contracts lying down, and they will have the support of the entire Canadian labour movement in fighting for free collective bargaining in the final countdown before the Winter Olympic Games.

[Canadian Labour Congress](#) president Ken Georgetti, bringing greetings on behalf of the CLC’s 3.2 million members, pledged to support [CUPE 873](#) ambulance paramedics in their struggle to achieve a negotiated contract with the BC Ambulance Service.

Georgetti said he is asked about B.C.'s declining reputation for labour relations every time he meets international labour leaders. They are particularly perplexed about the stalemate with ambulance paramedics.

“They want to know, ‘Why anger union members who provide such basic emergency health care services?’ I have a simple answer for them: you don’t know Gordon Campbell,” said Georgetti, adding that this is the same government which, among other things, has presided over the worst child poverty rate in the country, the encroachment of privatized health care and hydro, the sale of BC Rail, and the removal of defined pension benefit plans for workers—“all while they’re lining their own pockets.”

Liberals out of touch – Hunt

United Steelworkers District 3 director Steve Hunt, describing his experience in bargaining with the provincial government, recalled how he tried to convince the BC Liberals to “connect the dots” between the crippled forest industry and the long-term impact of job losses on the economy—for which ambulance paramedics are now being punished.

“But they didn’t listen. This government doesn’t connect the dots. They don’t care.”

Hunt said that the struggle of CUPE 873 members is a fight shared by all working people in B.C.

“Being an activist isn’t a spectator sport, and we can’t allow the paramedics to take this fight on by themselves,” he said. “We have to get angry and take action. Let’s turn this thing around. Get active, get angry, and get even. Solidarity works.”

Paramedics have public’s support – Walker

BC Government and Services Employees’ Union president Darryl Walker began his remarks by congratulating CUPE and Local 873 members for their “determined and lengthy efforts to highlight the work of your members” and the injustice of Bill 21, which legislated an end to their job action.

“In the face of top-level government spin operations to paint you as the enemy, you have gained the public’s support,” said Walker, adding that hundreds of BCGEU members, who work in administration for the BC Ambulance Service, have been on the picket line, “standing shoulder to shoulder with you to make sure that your efforts are not in vain.”

Walker, saying that public health care is not something that British Columbians should be prepared to give away, added that the government is at fault for its deterioration throughout the province, and ambulance paramedics are leading the discussion about how to fix it.

“The ambulance service is absolutely essential, and you have the right not only to have the work but to talk about what this service should look like.”

Olympic confrontation inevitable – Strohmaier

CUPE 873 president John Strohmaier reminded the crowd that this is an historical time not only for ambulance paramedics but all workers, since Bill 21 marks the first time a provincial government has legislated an end to a labour dispute while union members were voting on their last offer.

“This is about 200,000 public sector workers in B.C. who are at or are going to the bargaining table this year,” he said, rejecting media and government claims that Bill 21 is an isolated situation involving only ambulance paramedics.

“Bill 21 is all about the Olympics,” he said. “Well, ambulance paramedics didn’t pick this time to have a confrontation with Vanoc.” On the contrary, he said: Vanoc chose this time to interfere with the collective bargaining process.

Strohmaier added that Vanoc, the BC Ambulance Service, and the provincial government are mistaken if they assume that the threat of confrontation will ease as the Olympics draw near.

“Absent a fair negotiated settlement for ambulance paramedics, or a fair process for reaching one, a showdown during the Olympics is inevitable, and there will be no free pass for the government,” he said, referring to millions of dollars spent on complimentary tickets to Olympic events for VIPs.

“If we don’t fight now, we will be sanctioning the official dismantling of our ambulance service. We will be sanctioning the Kevin Falcon fix.”

The CUPE 873 president urged the B.C. labour movement to unite behind his members. “Let’s all use the next few weeks to make a lasting difference for all communities in B.C.,” he said.

Time to save our communities – O’Neill

[CUPE BC](#) president Barry O’Neill, the rally’s final speaker, praised CUPE 873 ambulance paramedics for their dedication to their communities.

“I have never met a group of people who care more about their occupation or the service they provide,” he said. But thanks to the government’s gutting of the ambulance service, “if someone in your family or a friend or a neighbor goes into cardiac arrest, and you live in one of these communities where response times are nine minutes, you have a fifty-fifty chance of making it. What kind of a statement is that?”

O’Neill captured the anger of many toward the provincial government by drawing attention to Campbell’s recent cancellation of cost of living increases for MLAs.

“Isn’t that special? Wouldn’t you take a cost of living freeze if you got a 59-per-cent salary increase last year?...The multinationals are given bailouts. What about our number one resource in this province, the forestry workers? What have they and all other working women and men in this province been given? A \$42 cutback in taxes this year.”

O'Neill urged the crowd not to let the government get away with Bill 21.

“Many of us here appreciated growing up where there were jobs, where there were ambulance paramedics, where there were services we needed,” he said. “We don't have the right to give away—and deprive our children and grandchildren of—what we fought so hard to get for ourselves.”

He also had a warning about the post-Olympic hangover.

“If we think it's bad now and we don't push back now, mark my words: the budget they bring down in March will be the most anti-labour budget in the history of this province.”

Labour movement united – Schira

Rally emcee Angela Schira, secretary-treasurer of the [BC Federation of Labour](#), said the fight against Bill 21 and in support of ambulance paramedics is gaining momentum.

“This and other rallies around the province are showing that, after nine months, the paramedics' fight is far from over. In fact, it's just beginning,” she said.

Schira acknowledged several prominent people in the crowd, including Burnaby Mayor Derek Corrigan and members of his Burnaby council, NDP MLAs Adrian Dix, Kathy Corrigan, Raj Chouhan and Dawn Black, as well as BC Fed president Jim Sinclair and union leaders from the United Food and Commercial Workers, Operating Engineers, Health Sciences Association, Longshoremen, Federation of Post Secondary Educators and Hospital Employees' Union.