

Prince Edward Island Report
National Privatization and Contracting-Out Committee
Meeting in Ottawa, ON – November 25th – 27th, 2009

Since our last meeting in March of 2009, the issue of privatization on Prince Edward Island has been “relatively speaking”, quiet. The government is elbows deep into yet another round of health care restructuring, which they are now calling the “Integrated Health Services Project”. The thrust of this project seems to be the streamlining of scopes of practise and the ultimate centralization (to the degree it is possible) of services to ‘rationalize’ the use of resources and staffing across our small province.

Unfortunately, while Corpus Sanchez are the authors of the report, the Ghiz government is relying upon this initiative, and we have been told officially that privatization is not on the agenda. The health unions on Prince Edward Island are being locked out of the planning process, and instead, Employer appointees from staff are being used in the “Steering Committees” and planning stages. They seem to be more for show and a rubber stamp than anything concrete, and the problem for us is that the union leadership has been denied the right to appoint our own knowledgeable union representatives to these committees (one committee has over 80 people on it) and we are consequently left in the dark waiting for information to trickle in from government.

Fortunately, the health care Unions on PEI (UPSE – NUPGE affiliate-, PEINU, IUOE and CUPE) have an ongoing coalition of sorts to deal with these types of issues, and we have been lobbying government as a group to recognize our right to representation and to have first hand involvement, but that remains a work in progress.

The only recent issue of potential privatization here on PEI (since our last meeting, that has cropped up), relates to the 911 Emergency dispatch services for the Island.

When 911 came to Prince Edward Island a few short years ago, the system was a “mish-mash” of dispatch systems. The RCMP, Cities of Charlottetown and Summerside Police, and Fire Services, all had their own professional dispatch services for decades. The blending of 911 with those services was easy.

However, rural fire departments, as well as a number of private ambulance companies, (prior to government creating Island EMS in the early years of the 21st century) and smaller rural police departments each had (and still have) their own separate answering service type dispatch systems. Blending these dispatch systems into 911 was, and remains, a challenge.

The Ghiz government announced earlier this year, that “Requests for Information” (RFI) on the separation of what they called the “Call Answer/ Transfer” component of the 911 system into a central “Call Answer/ Transfer.” This is the piece of the 911 system that a citizen will make first contact with and from where the call is transferred to the specific emergency service (Fire, Police or EMS) required by the caller.

The problem with this is as follows. The RCMP, Charlottetown City Police and Fire Dispatchers (Police Association of NS members) and Summerside Police and Fire Dispatchers (CUPE Local 1174 members) do both the “Call Answer/Transfer” piece and the 911 police and fire dispatch piece for these services presently. Moving the “Call Answer/Transfer” piece of this work to some other central location will not only take this work away from our members but will add one degree of separation in the largest dispatch centres on PEI, which does not exist now. This will result in more time being lost in emergencies and the real potential for information errors and information seepage while transferring the information from one dispatcher to another.

This was not the only surprise we received when we researched the government’s RFI.

Both on the RFI link and in the “Introduction” piece of the RFI document itself stated the following:

“The Prince Edward Office of Public Safety is seeking Proposals for the following:

- *Operate a Centralized 911 Call Answer/Transfer (PSAP) service.*
- *As an option, the proposal should also include the capability to **incorporate the dispatch services for volunteer Fire Departments** (emphasis mine) and EMS.*
- *As an option, the proposal should also **include the capability to incorporate Police dispatch functionality.*** (emphasis mine)
- ***These functions would be required to operate as one cohesive unit with a central Emergency Services Communication Centre.*** (emphasis mine)

Clearly the RFI was intended to seek interest and information from service providers to do more, or provide information on their capacity to do more, than just the “Call Answer/Transfer” piece of 911. It is this fact that required CUPE and the PEI Police Association (PEIPA) to act in our members’ interests.

After making our concerns public and receiving considerable coverage the government was sent a letter asking for a meeting between the Premier, Attorney General and Community and Cultural Affairs Ministers. What we received was an

offer to meet with Mr. Aaron Campbell, the Deputy Minister of the Office of Public Safety, who is responsible for the 911 system and who was also responsible for putting out the RFI itself.

The meeting between Mr. Campbell, the PEI Police Association (the President of the PEIPA is Milo Murray, a member of CUPE Local 1174, President of CUPE PEI Division and CUPE PEI's RVP on the NEB) and CUPE Local 1174 is scheduled for November 5th, 2009.

Our expectation is that Mr. Campbell will assure us that nothing will change for Local 1174 and PANS members in Charlottetown and Summerside but we felt it was critical for us to step in to make certain government understood they could not privatize our work without another fight from CUPE.

We will update the committee on the outcome at our next NCPCC meeting.

In solidarity,

Blaine Parkman

BP/lfl/cope 491