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**HEALTH CARE: Hospital workers, paramedics consider strike action**

# Talks between provincial hospital association, unions break down

BY JENNIFER BROWN  
 STAFF WRITER

York Region hospital workers and paramedics don't favour illegal strike action, but they may find themselves walking a picket line as union leaders threaten a walkout for next month.

Talks between the unions and the Ontario Hospital Association broke down last week and leaders representing the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and the Service

Employees International Union (SEIU) say they will begin applying more pressure.

"We're very disappointed, but hopefully we will get back to the table and get things worked out. That can happen if we get a fair arbitrator," said Lorne Cowx, a Newmarket paramedic based out of York County Hospital who is also the local SEIU representative.

Such a strike would affect York County Hospital the most because 500

paramedics and service workers there are unionized under SEIU.

And while some employees at Markham Stouffville Hospital belong to CUPE, the impact would not be as great, as paramedics there are organized under the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU).

The strike would not affect York Central Hospital in Richmond Hill, where the employees are not unionized.

Cowx said that while current SEIU president Ken Brown said a strike vote will be held soon, the past president of the union does not favour such action.

"Hopefully it won't escalate beyond a strike vote," he said.

However, Cowx acknowledges it may take more than bargaining to get the attention of the OHA. The unions have been working without a contract since 1995.

"Like a dog that keeps getting beaten, every once in a while, the dog is going to bite back," he said.

Earlier this month, hospital workers at York County staged an information picket in front of the hospital during their breaks and lunch hour.

A similar picket was also held by CUPE members at Markham Stouffville Hospital.

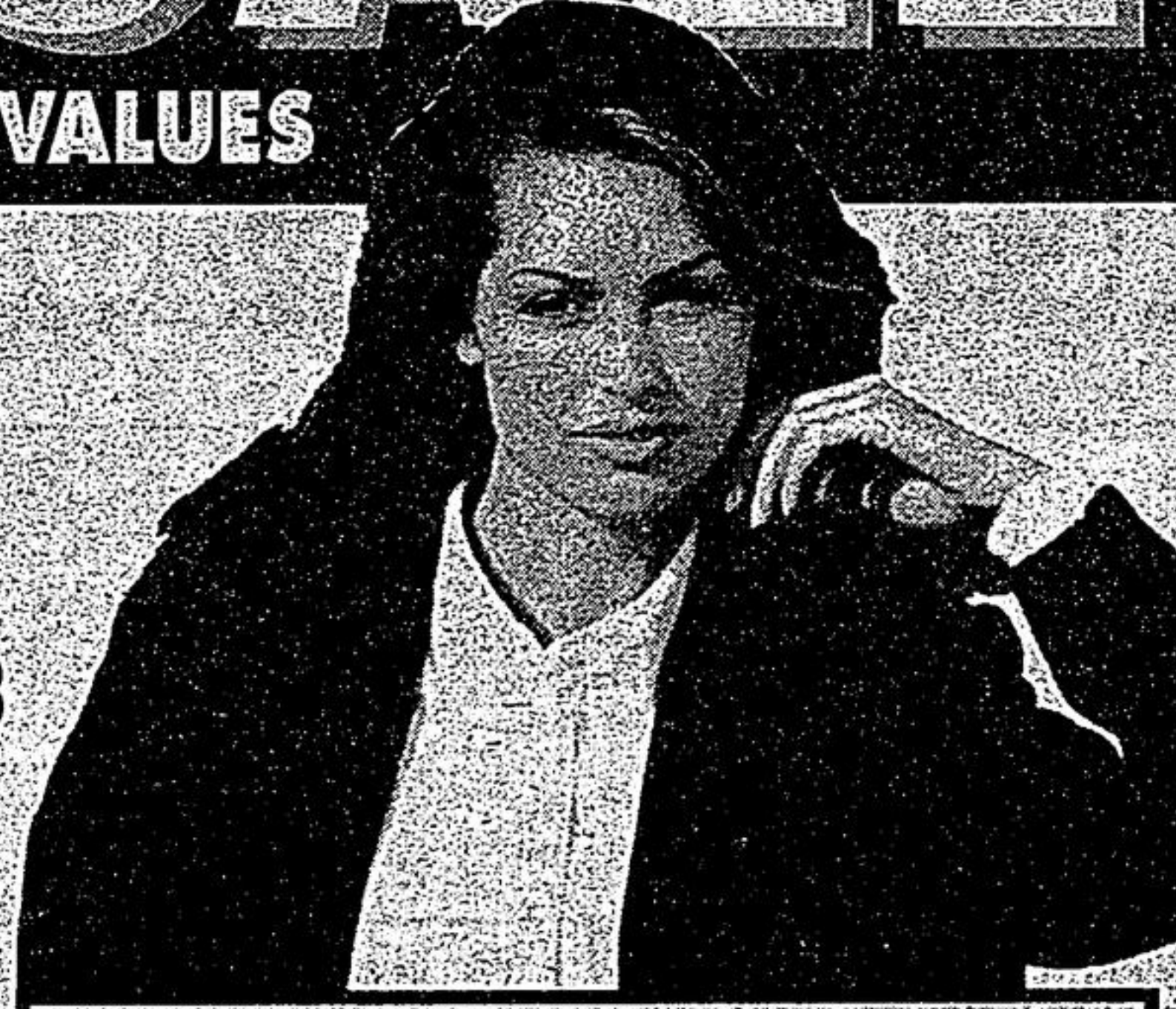
Hospitals say they have contingency plans in place should an illegal strike occur.

The SEIU workers include paramedics, clerical, housekeeping and food service personnel and registered practical nurses, who are not permitted to strike under law as they are considered an essential service.

While wages are a concern, the bigger issue in dispute is the OHA's desire to remove language in the hospital workers' collective agreement that prevents contracting out of services.

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**CORRECTION NOTICE**  
 In our ad in Saturday's paper (Oct. 24) we featured the Plaza Las Glorias San Carlos in San Carlos, Mexico with Sunquest, departing Nov. 19 - Dec. 10, 1998. The departure date should have read Jan. 7, 1999.  
 We apologize for any inconvenience this error may have caused.

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