

EMS Talks Walkout After Koch Remark

By Gale Scott

Emergency Medical Services union officials yesterday warned of illegal walkouts beginning tomorrow by workers angered that Mayor Edward I. Koch said ambulance workers should earn less than police or firefighters because their jobs are less dangerous.

"It was an insensitive, misinformed thing to say. This confirms the members' worse fears, that the city doesn't respect us," said Richard McAllan, president of Local 2507 of District Council 37.

The 2,000-member local has been without a contract since July, union officials said.

The threatened walkout will be discussed at a meeting of the membership tonight, according to McAllan.

Among the issues is what the union says is the \$11,000 gap between the \$22,000 salary of an EMS worker with three years' experience and the \$33,000 salary of city firefighters and police with the same amount of experience.

Yesterday, as the mayor was leaving a noontime EMS graduation ceremony at the EMS Training Academy in Queens, an ambulance crew member asked Koch when they could expect pay parity, McAllan said.

Local 2507 Vice President Richard Gutwirth said he was standing next to Koch. He said the mayor said, "Never, I hope."

Gutwirth said he then asked why.

"The mayor said, 'Because you're not in a dangerous job. You're not cops,'" said Gutwirth, "Then he made a beeline for his helicopter."

Two other EMS workers confirmed Gutwirth's version of Koch's remarks.

They said they were among about a dozen who witnessed the exchange.

Mayoral spokesman Tom Kelly said he was at the ceremony, but did not hear the exchange.

Kelly said he was present when the mayor was asked about it later.

"The mayor said, 'Someone asked me if EMS would get parity and I said they wouldn't because cops are always on the frontline willing to give up their lives,'" Kelly said.

Said local President McAllan: "I didn't hear the remark, but I heard about it forthwith from the members. The local is extremely volatile. A lot of people are very upset."

City Health and Hospitals Corporation spokeswoman Suzanne Halpin said she had no information last night about the threatened walkout or what HHC would do if it happened.

Monday
Mail 2, 1988

Ambulance workers to call in sick

CITY ambulance workers voted last night to come to work out of uniform today to protest Mayor Koch's remark on Tuesday that they should earn less than police and firefighters because their jobs are less dangerous.

Some 400 workers also agreed to call in sick tomorrow and stage a City Hall demonstration.

EMS Votes for 24-Hour Sickout Tomorrow

By Gale Scott

Ambulance crews voted last night to shut down the city Emergency Medical Services tomorrow with a 24-hour wild-cat sickout.

The sickout is scheduled to begin with the 6 a.m. shift with about 500 workers calling in sick.

Today, crews will work in street clothes as a show of unity, said Dominic Maggiore, a shop steward of Local 2507 of District Council 37.

At a three-hour meeting last night — punctuated by shouts of "Strike, Strike" — approximately 700 workers

of the 2,000-member union agreed on the sickout.

"This is not sanctioned by the executive board," said the local's vice president, Richard Gutwirth, who attended the meeting in the union's Manhattan hall. Workers have been without a contract since July.

The sickout was sparked, in part, by remarks made Tuesday by Mayor Edward I. Koch, who told workers at an EMS graduation ceremony that they would never be paid as much as police and firefighters because they don't risk their lives.

After last night's vote Koch said, "I urge the EMS workers not to violate the Taylor Law or the oath of Geneva they all took not to abandon patients. We'll do whatever is required to provide the services that is needed." The state Taylor Law forbids strikes by public employees.

One major issue behind the sickout is pay. An EMS worker with three years on the job currently earns \$22,000 a year, while city firefighters and police officers with the same seniority make \$33,000.

Another is sick-time policy. Accord-

ing to the union, while police and firefighters have unlimited sick time for on-the-job injuries, EMS workers get only 12 days.

A crowd of 50 EMS workers gathered in a corridor of the union's hall as the meeting continued, angrily taking issue with the mayor's comment concerning the hazards of their jobs.

"I've got a dislocated shoulder, torn cartilage and a cracked sternum, I didn't get them playing tennis," said Joseph Santamaria. "I've been shot at, had garbage cans thrown at me from four stories, I've even had a spear thrown at me."

EMS votes a walkout on contract lag

By **TONY MARCANO**

Daily News Staff Writer

Defying union leadership, city Emergency Medical Service workers last night voted to walk off the job tomorrow for a day to protest sluggish contract talks and what they consider derogatory comments made by Mayor Koch earlier this week.

Richard Gutwirth, vice president of Local 2057 of District Council 37, said the union's rank and file ejected the local's executive board from a meeting at DC 37 headquarters last night after the board urged less drastic action. The rank and file then voted for the 24-hour wildcat ambulance-crew walkout.

Gutwirth said that about 700 EMS employees voted to report to work this morning at 6 a.m. out of uniform, and to walk off the job from 6 a.m. tomorrow until 6 a.m. Saturday. The rank and file also agreed to "possibly escalate" the job action from March 13 to March 21, depending on the outcome of this week-end's actions.

The city's Health and Hospitals Corp., which runs EMS, will seek a court order to bar the walkout, HHC spokeswoman Suzanne Halpin said. Medics who show up for work today out of uniform will be read an order "saying they are in violation of EMS procedure and subject to disciplinary action," she said.

The walkout would violate the state's Taylor Law, which prohibits strikes by public employees.

The medics have been working without a contract for seven months.

Gutwirth said that technicians, paramedics and other employees "went nuts" at an EMS graduation ceremony Tuesday after Koch said EMS workers do not deserve salary parity with cops and firefighters because their job is not dangerous.

"You can tell people that they're not going to get the money, fine," Gutwirth said. "But one thing you don't tell people is that the job they're in is not dangerous. Koch just put his big foot in his big fat mouth."

Wildcat sickout KOs half of EMS

By LESLIE GEVIRTZ

MORE than half the city's ambulance workers on today's day tour defied a court order and called in sick.

The job action was expected to continue, and by tonight the Emergency Medical Service could begin having problems responding to calls for help.

"Our crunch time starts in the late afternoon and gets really

busy as the night wears on," said a source, who asked not to be identified.

The 1716 EMS specialists answer an average of 2000 calls for help daily.

An EMS spokesman said 176 of the 347 paramedics, medical technicians and drivers on today's 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. shift called in sick.

But Suzanne Halpin said that was not having an immediate af-

fect on response time.

She said the service had a contingency plan in place that involved:

- Very aggressive screening to make sure the most-life-threatening calls are answered.

- Having cops and voluntary ambulances respond to less-serious injuries.

- And urging the public to call 911 only when there is a real

emergency," she said.

The city obtained a temporary restraining order barring the paramedics, emergency medical technicians and drivers from staging the job action yesterday after 250 out of 300 workers showed up for the day shift in street clothes.

The EMS employees are protesting Mayor Koch's claim that they don't deserve the same pay as

cops and firefighters.

"They just don't do the same thing as cops," Koch said. "Cops put their lives on the line every day."

EMS employees start at \$21,500 a year. Starting cops and firefighters earn \$26,000.

"We're advising the employees who call in sick that they're in violation of the court order and the Taylor Law," said Halpin.

EMS crews take to street clothes in pay battle

By CHRIS OLERT

CITY ambulance workers yesterday refused to wear their uniforms to work and threatened a wildcat sickout today unless they get the same salary as cops and firefighters.

The city obtained a temporary restraining order barring Emergency Medical Service workers from staging the job action and said it would retaliate with the harsh Taylor Law.

Under the law, which bars public employes from striking, EMS workers could be docked two days pay for every day of work missed.

Yesterday, 250 of 300 EMS workers on the day shift left their uniforms at home and wore street clothes.

They were protesting Mayor Koch's claim that they don't deserve the same pay as cops and firefighters.

"They just don't do the same thing as cops," he said. "Cops put their lives on the line every day."

He also reiterated a stand he took earlier this week when he said he hopes EMS workers never get the same salary as police officers or firefighters.

EMS workers start at \$21,500 a year. Starting police officers and firefighters are paid \$26,000.

Defiant EMS workers were told they would face disciplinary action if they show up for work wearing civilian clothing.

One supervisor said it was foolish not to wear uniforms because they guarantee "safe passage in many neighborhoods."



Court Order Bars EMS 'Sickout'

Emergency Medical Services workers reported to work out of uniform in large numbers yesterday, demanding pay parity with city police and firefighters and threatening to stage a sickout today, officials said.

Meanwhile, Acting State Supreme Court Justice Edward H. Lehner issued a temporary restraining order barring the workers "from any concerted job action," said Suzanne Halpin, spokeswoman for the city's Health and Hospitals Corp.

"We will order the membership to work, but we don't know if the TRO will stop them," said Daniel Burstein, secretary-treasurer of the EMS union.

Of the 300 workers on the day shift, 250 showed up for work in street clothes yesterday, Halpin said. HHC employs about 2,000 EMS workers.

On Wednesday, 700 workers at a three-hour meeting agreed to halt EMS ambulance service by calling in sick during the 24-hour period beginning at 6 a.m. today.

An order was read to workers yesterday telling them that by not being in uniform they were in violation of HHC codes and warning them to report to work in uniform next time or they may be subject to disciplinary action, Halpin said.

Halpin did not say what actions might be taken but said that today's violations will be noted in the workers' personnel files.

A main issue in the dispute is the demand that ambulance workers be paid as much as police and firefighters. Currently, an EMS worker with three years experience earns \$22,000 while a comparable police officer or firefighter earns \$32,000.

The situation was exacerbated earlier this week when Mayor Edward I. Koch said that EMS workers would "never" be paid as much as police.

Yesterday Koch said that any EMS worker participating in any kind of job action would be fined two days pay for each day of work missed.

"They're mad because I said an EMS worker is not a cop. He's not a cop," Koch said. "A cop puts his life on the line — as does a fireman — every single day."

"That doesn't mean we don't value the services of the EMS worker. People do different things, and I don't think they can be described as doing what a cop does," the mayor said.

EMS workers are prohibited from staging any job action by the state's Taylor Law. Union leaders said they have not approved of any job action.

—Manuel Perez-Rivas

Pay battle making EMS crews 'sick'

By DANIEL HAYS

Daily News Staff Writer

The city yesterday obtained a court order barring Emergency Medical Service workers from staging a potentially life-threatening wildcat sickout today.

But a union leader predicted EMS workers will disregard the court order and stay off the job as part of an effort to win pay parity with city cops.

"In my opinion people are not going to take notice of (the order)," said Richard Gutwirth, vice president of Local 2507. "People will, I imagine, stick to the plan of action."

City lawyers obtained the order late in the afternoon as officials said they had drawn up contingency plans for handling the 2,000 ambulance runs that 1,716 EMS special-

ists and paramedics handle daily.

Suzanne Halpin, a spokesman for the Health and Hospitals Corp., declined to discuss the specifics of the plan.

"The public should expect when they call 911 or EMS that they will get a response," Halpin said, adding "there is no reason to assume" EMS workers will violate the court order.

Taylor Law

Manhattan Supreme Court Justice Edward Lehner signed the restraining order under the Taylor Law, which prohibits job actions by municipal workers and opens them to penalties of two days' pay for every day they stay off the job.

The court action followed a day in which 80% to 90% of the 300 EMS workers on the day shift showed up out of uniform to protest the city

stand against the pay-hike demand.

The union rank-and-file voted to stage the sickout at a meeting Wednesday night after ejecting the union leadership from the session. In an apparent attempt to avoid Taylor Law penalties, the leaders have taken the position that the threatened job action is not sanctioned by the union local.

Gutwirth said the union is asking a \$6,000 increase for EMS specialists, whose starting pay is now \$21,564 and reaches \$23,654 after three years. The starting pay for cops is \$25,977, rising to \$32,673.

He seeks apology

Gutwirth also said Mayor Koch inflamed EMS workers Tuesday at an EMS graduation ceremony when he was asked why he was opposing par-

ity and told Gutwirth, "because you're not in a dangerous job. You're not a cop."

Citing the case of Donna Corillo, an EMS worker who suffered multiple leg fractures after being attacked by an emotionally disturbed patient, Gutwirth said: "I'm inviting the mayor to personally apologize to this woman, who he says is not in a dangerous job."

Daniel Burstein, treasurer of Local 2507, said members would stage a noon rally at City Hall.

In interviews around the city yesterday rank-and-file union members expressed varied support for a sickout but outrage at the idea their job is not dangerous. They told of venturing into crack dens and treating emotionally disturbed patients, as well as persons with infectious diseases.