

The New York Times.

NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 1965

UNION COMPLAINS OF WILLOWBROOK

Charges School Mistreats
Nonprofessional Workers

By JOHN SIBLEY

Nonprofessional workers at the Willowbrook State School for Mental Defectives on Staten Island complained yesterday that attendants as well as patients were being mistreated.

The attendants, kitchen and laundry help and maintenance workers voiced their complaints at a closed-door session in the employes' lounge over the garage in Building 60.

The meeting was restricted, not by the workers' union, which called the session, but by Willowbrook's director, Dr. Jack Hammond, who posted police at the building entrance to bar newsmen. However, a reporter for this newspaper who entered with a group of union officials was not asked to identify himself.

From 6 A.M. until late in the day, workers entered the lounge in small groups as they went off duty. They registered their complaints with officials of the union, New York State Employees Council 50.

Some of Their Grievances

Among their grievances were these:

¶Doctors treat them with contempt.

¶Doctors refuse to attend to sick patients when called by nonprofessional attendants.

¶Maintenance employes are required to work at doctors' residences on the institution's grounds.

¶When summer jobs are filled, friends and relatives of the doctors get the best ones.

¶The "palatial" doctors' residences cause resentment among employes who "take home less than \$70 a week."

Aroused From Sleep

Among the first workers to be heard was a woman on the midnight shift in Building 11. She reported that when no attendants were available for work on that shift in Ward D—which, she said, happened more often than not—the youngsters

... was a woman on the
... in Building 11.
... that when no at-
... were available for

work on that shift in Ward D—
which, she said, happened more
often than not—the youngsters
in that ward were roused from
their sleep and carried to other
wards. She said that, thrust
into strange, dark quarters and
then left alone, the frightened
children often cried until dawn.

A number of the employes
reported there had been a sud-
den clean-up drive in the wake
of last week's charge by Sena-
tor Robert F. Kennedy that
Willowbrook's retarded children
were getting less attention
than animals in a zoo.

Senator Kennedy told a leg-
islative committee: "There are
no civil liberties for those put
in the cells of Willowbrook,
living amidst brutality and
human excrement and intesti-
nal disease."

Mrs. Vangelina Nelson, an
attendant in Building 22, said
yesterday the reaction to the
Kennedy attack was swift.

Tells of Cleanup Order

"We were told, 'Get this place
cleaned up,'" she said.
"There's photographers com-
ing. Get the kids dressed up
and get 'em outside playing."

"They [the ward supervisors]
were in such a hurry," Mrs.
Nelson added, "that we prac-
tically had to finish dressing
the kids outdoors."

Mrs. Nelson identified Mrs.
Frances Laub as her supervi-
sor, and commented: "That's
Khrushchev's sister."

Mrs. Laub could not be
reached for comment.

The supervisor's reported
fear of photographers was un-
warranted. News photographers
have not been allowed inside
Willowbrook's buildings, or in
other state schools, since Sen-
ator Kennedy's attack last
Thursday.

Alfred Wurf, executive di-
rector of Council 50, asserted:

"The professional employes
such as doctors, therapists and
teachers play a nominal role
in patient treatment. It is the
nonprofessional employes, such
as attendants and kitchen help,
who deal with the patient on
the day-to-day level.

Doctors Are Accused

"These employes make the
difference as to the well-being
and happiness of the patient.
Under the present Teutonic sys-
tem, the employes are treated
with contempt and are belittled.
What is needed is a complete
changeover by the state and the
people who run these institu-
tions."

Mr. Wurf charged that Wil-
lowbrook doctors, particularly
those trained in Europe, treated
the nonprofessional workers
contemptuously. "They want the
kind of subservience they got
in Europe," he said.

The union official also
charged that employes were
sometimes exposed unnecessar-
ily to physical violence.

Dr. Hammond replied angrily
last night that it was "a typical
tactic by Mr. Wurf" to "vilify,
insult and provoke me."

The director was particularly
incensed at the workers' charge
that doctors refused to respond
when summoned by attendants.

"That's an outright fabrica-
tion," he exclaimed. He said
the night supervising nurse was
required to log each call to a
doctor.

"And I get a report on when
the doctor responded," he added.

New York Times

September 15, 1965