

Strike threat is eased at Willowbrook

Willowbrook State School will not be immediately affected if a threatened series of strikes at state mental hygiene institutions begins, as scheduled, next Monday.

Leamon Hood, organizing representative at the local institution, said union members there have not yet been asked for a strike vote.

He said, however "The strike vote has already been taken among state institutions in the New York metropolitan area," and the institutions to be struck first will be announced today.

Those striking would be members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employes, Council 50, of the AFL-CIO.

Hood added that the Island institution could eventually be involved, "if the governor continues to renege on his promise of last year to allow state employes to vote on who they want to represent them."

The trouble began last year when Gov. Rockefeller designated the Civil Service Employes Association as bargaining agents for 142,000 state employes for a one-year period. Approximately 105,000 of these are mental hygiene employes.

The year will be up Nov. 15, but the federation is protesting the governor's current negotiations with the association for a three-year contract and what it alleges to be his "renewed recognition of the CSEA as bargaining agent."

Harold Newman, director of the state's Public Employment Relations Board, said the federation and other unions had protested the recognition of the association as sole bargaining agent for state employes.

He added that the board's members are now considering a proposal to provide for six bargaining units instead of one, but "they have not yet had an opportunity to make a ruling."

Hood said there will be no strike "if the governor will meet with the committees of the local unions before (next Monday) and come to some sort of constructive agreement."

So far, he claimed, Rockefeller

has ignored the union's requests for a meeting.

Both the CSEA and Hood's organization have espoused the strike threat in seeking their demands. The concessions they are seeking are fairly similar, chiefly differing in wage increases and retirement and health care benefits. The Civil Service Employes Association is presently negotiating for an across-the-board \$1,200 wage increase for its members. The AFL-CIO unit is seeking a \$1,600 raise and a minimum wage of \$6,000.

Hood asserted that turnover at Willowbrook is high, claiming "about 1,500 employes left last year and it costs about \$240 to train each employe."

He claims the turnover is due to low wages, heavy work loads and poor job security. "People are fired or given the option to resign and not even told why," said Hood.

Concerning the bargaining agent controversy, a spokesman at CSEA headquarters Albany said, "What the governor has done is well within the law and entirely supported by it. The Taylor Law provides that a public employer can set up a proper bargaining unit for its employes and, once that unit is set up, can also set up a bargaining agent."

The spokesman continued, "The AFL-CIO's Council 50 represents only about 10,000 state employes, while the CSEA represents about 30,000. I think if more employes wanted to be represented by Council 50, they would have joined it and made their preference known in that manner."

Hood, disputing both membership figures, stated that the association claim is "misleading because many state employes think that because they are civil service employes they have to join the CSEA. And it's a fact that no state employe can get life and health insurance without membership in the CSEA."

Federation membership at Willowbrook is close to 900, according to union officials. Thomas Delancy, chapter president of the CSEA at the Island institution, puts his membership total at 1,700.

Concerning the strike threat, State Sen. John Marchi said such a move against "these helpless, defenseless human beings would be a tragedy indeed." He said he did not anticipate, but "would not rule out," a special session of the Legislature if a strike were called.