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Pay Policies Challenged At Willowbrook Pay Policies Questioned

by Karen Sanazaro

Disgruntled employees of Willowbrook State School have lodged a complaint against the school for its "illegal and unfair" payroll policies. Following a trip to Albany where a group of workers registered their complaint with Controller Arthur Levitt, a meeting was called during which employees and officers of Willowbrook discussed the school's policies with state representatives.

Eager Smith, leading the 20-employee delegation to the meeting, read 16 signed and sworn affidavits from Willowbrook workers. Among the listening were Henry Lipscomb, Jr., assistant state attorney general; William J. Corrigan, labor relations representative of the

Mental Hygiene Department; Mrs. Helen Degnan and Frank D'Ambrosy, payroll technicians from the State Department of Audit and Control; Dr. Jack Hammond, director of Willowbrook; Ernest Palcic, senior business officer; and Thomas Delaney, payroll accountant at Willowbrook.

The employees were protesting the fact that for a variety of reasons, checks are late, lost or erroneous. The check shown below, for instance, was received 3 months after resignation. Under the school's present system of payment, total hours for each two week period are submitted by the Payroll Office to Albany, and Albany sends

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checks to the school. This means that when errors are made by payroll officials, the checks must be returned to Albany for correction while the employee waits several weeks without pay. Furthermore, when initially hired at the school, employees are not told that they will receive their first check 3 or 4 weeks after beginning work.

A major concern of the employees is the school's use of the local credit union. The union is headed by Willowbrook's business manager, Ernest Palcic, which suggests to workers a conflict of interest. It seems that on being hired, employees are given applications for membership in the union without being told what they are signing. Employees claim they are given the impression they must sign the paper (join the union) in order to receive their paychecks. When money is owed the credit union employees' checks are withheld by the school.

At the same time, the credit union is the only source of temporary funds available to employees whose checks are lost or delayed. The State requires that erroneous checks be returned to Albany and that during the interim employees use the "cheapest and most convenient" means of obtaining funds—that is, the federally-chartered credit union at the institution.

Another unusual practice questioned by employees is the failure to inform employees of the exact salary at which they are hired, and subsequently paying them varying amounts with no explanation. There is also the practice of deducting an

overpayment in one lump sum from a subsequent check instead of, as the state requires, dividing the amount among several checks. Employees also complained of being told no state funds were available to cover damage to their personal belongings caused by vandals at the school.

Dr. Hammond made little comment on the accusations, except that some of them were not altogether true. He stated that part of the problem resulted from mistaken information from employees who were misinformed of the school's usual payroll procedures.

Reports on the results of state investigation of Willowbrook's policies will be forthcoming from the state attorney general and the controller.

State of New York No. 00002610

DEPARTMENT OF TAXATION AND FINANCE — DIVISION OF THE TREASURY
NATIONAL COMMERCIAL BANK & TRUST COMPANY
ALBANY, NEW YORK

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PAY TO THE ORDER OF
K. L. ARMENTROUT

\$0.08

Luther Smith
STATE COMPTROLLER

Norman Gallman
COMMISSIONER OF TAXATION AND FINANCE

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As if to verify employee charges, this check was received last week, 3 months after the employee had resigned from Willowbrook. The only explanation for the 8c read "exchange check."