

Willowbrook pay protest fizzles

By FRANK HAGELBERG

Disident employees at Willowbrook State School failed yesterday in their attempt to meet with state officials at Gov. Rockefeller's Manhattan office to protest what they termed "corruption" within the institution's payroll department.

A group of 25 employees spent more than two hours on a picket line outside the office while their leaders tried to arrange an appointment with representatives of the governor.

The group returned to Staten Island by bus at 1:30 p.m., vowing to go back later in the week to press their demands.

Eager Smith, a spokesman for the protesting workers, had earlier reported that an appointment with Alton Marshall, secretary to the governor, had been made for 10:30 a.m. yesterday. Smith admitted yesterday that the appointment had been scheduled by sending a telegram to the governor late last week "requesting an audience."

The workers—most of whom were on their day off, a leader of the group said—went to Manhattan to dramatize their allegations of corruption in the payroll procedures at the school.

The demonstrators carried placards saying, "We want a better deal at Willowbrook State School," "Stop payroll abuse in state hospitals and schools," and "PERB (State Employment Relations Board) don't want to be disturbed: They protect racists." Police were called to the West 5th St. office as a "normal precaution," but there were no incidents.

Officials in charge of payroll accounting at the state facility are "stealing money from employees," Smith charged yesterday. He claimed consistent "intentional" mistakes in the bi-monthly payrolls and complained that the school's procedure for adjusting mistakes in checks were "forcing employees to join the credit union and pay interest on money they already earned."

Thomas DeLaney, payroll director at the school, explained that the school's payroll operation is supervised by the federal government.

Smith also charged a "conflict of interest" exists at the school. "Last time the governor referred us to our Civil Service Representative," Smith said, "But Thomas DeLaney is the president of the CSEA chapter, and how can we go to him to complain about him?"

The other area of alleged conflicting interest stems from the fact that Ernest Palco, chief business officer at the school and Delaney's superior, is president of the federally chartered credit union.

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Dr. Jack Hammond, director of the school, yesterday defended the operation of the institution's payroll. "The credit union," he said, "was established locally to avoid the hardship on the employees resulting when incorrect checks were returned to Albany."

He would regret very much having to do it, but it had to be necessary to discontinue the line of accommodation.

"Of the 2,100 employees in the wards alone," the director said, "200 to 300 are absent each day on the average." On weekends and holidays, the unscheduled absenteeism usually reaches "300 or more," he said.

We are doing things correctly, and are prepared to answer to the duly authorized officials when requested to do so," Hammond declared.

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