

Civil Service LEADER

— March On Albany Today —

'No Thanks For Our Dedication', Willowbrook Therapists Complain As State Seeks To Reduce Jobs

STATEN ISLAND—A group of employees at Willowbrook State School who have dedicated much of their working lives to helping retarded youngsters have threatened an unspecified job action for March 16 if the State goes ahead with its plan to remove these employees from their jobs.

The State told more than 30 provisional employees involved in occupational, recreational and physical therapy at the School, that they would have to leave their current positions and take much lower-paying jobs in other areas of the institution or leave, although most of them have spent years and gained invaluable experience working in these therapy programs.

A group of the employees met early last week with CSEA officials in Albany, following which CSEA representatives met with officials of the State Office of Employee Relations and the Department of Mental Hygiene.



Answering the question of Elsie Calvin, standing left, are Thomas Delaney, chapter president and Patrick Fraser, chapter representative.

CSEA president Theodore C. Wenzl said the State Administration was unwilling to resolve the problem in the interests of the employees. Last Thursday, Wenzl and other CSEA representatives informed the employees at a meeting at Willowbrook of the State's feelings and pledged CSEA's full cooperation and support in settling the matter. The employees voted to go to Albany, today, March 2, and, with CSEA officials, visit Abe Lavine, director of State employee relations, at the State Capitol, to find why the State refuses to settle the issue.

Wenzl said that the problem exists not only at Willowbrook, but at many other institutions and, "We intend to see it through to a successful conclusion."

Deprived Of Training

The angry workers charged that the State, specifically the Department of Mental Hygiene, had deprived them of the training that would have prepared them for an examination given for the positions last June.

A spokesman for the group said that the employees were induced by the Department to leaving their permanent po-

sitions to enter a new career program in the therapy field with the promises of advancement, for specialized training and personal satisfaction. Instead, they were forced to take an open competitive examination for these positions without any training whatsoever, and as a result, many of us failed."

The spokesman also questioned the validity of the examination, saying it did not pertain to specific work they are involved in. He concentrated on reading comprehension. "You don't teach a profoundly retarded child how to exercise his unused muscles through reading comprehension. It requires love, dedication, patience and perseverance. You don't acquire these qualities by passing an examination which is geared toward testing our intellectual capabilities or with two years of college."

Love And Affection

"Many of these youngsters, who have been patients at the School for years, have never known any family, care or affection other than that which they have received from these dedicated employees who are now being told they are no longer wanted. These same

workers watched these children admitted as hopelessly mentally and physically retarded cases and worked with them until they were able to walk, talk, play, write, tie their shoes and perform other functions never expected of them. It was their love and affection and simple things, such as taking the kids to the School commissary and buying them soda, cookies and candy out of their own pocket, that made these children respond. The employees look back on the accomplishment they made with 'their children' while receiving pitiful salaries and working under the most intolerable conditions.

"The Civil Service Department has boasted in recent years of opening State employment to minority groups through training and education programs and career fields. What is the Department going to do about these minority group employees at Willowbrook who have been doing the job right along at low salaries without the benefit of education and training programs? We seriously question whether the spirit and intent of the Civil Service Law is being applied in the case of these employees."