

It's your opinion

Friday, January 21, 1972

Employees resent TV coverage

The Mental Hygiene Employees Association, representing over 7,000 Mental Hygiene employees throughout the State of New York takes exception to the recent rash of adverse publicity that has been accorded to Willowbrook State School by members of the television news media who appear to be embarked upon a "hatchet campaign" against everything at Willowbrook. Their activities in guiding these parents to active participation and demonstrations at Willowbrook and in the buildings of Willowbrook is causing the public to look with almost sheer repulsion at the employees of Willowbrook. While it has not been said, the implications are there.

The association would also like to protest the disruptive influence that this news media is causing on patient treatment. While there may be room for improvement in treatment programs, the treatment programs that we are providing are being disrupted and the residents being placed in danger through this harassment.

We would like to remind the public that our employees are dedicated persons who for practically minimum wages give a good part of their lives to taking care of these unfortunates who are mentally retarded. Our employees have voluntarily contributed of their own time and their own money to supply these residents with the love and affection that would normally be given to them by their parents. We invite Geraldo Rivera from "Eye-ness News" to contact the employees of Willowbrook and ask them what they think. While we appreciate Mr. Rivera's right to report the news as he sees it, we also feel that Mr. Rivera is obliged to present our side of the story.

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President,
Mental Hygiene Employees Assn.

Rehabilitation Department,
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Tuesday, January 25, 1972

If we're human, let's be kind

As a concerned citizen, I am appalled by the present conditions at Willowbrook State Hospital. It is only by uniting and voicing our opinions as taxpayers and voters that we can begin to hope that an interest will be taken in the less fortunate. I think it is about time that we "pull up the shade" and take a look at others instead of a sole interest in self. Let me caution you. If you are able to do this, do not be frightened by what you see. You may see for the first time that erecting monumental edifices, building highways, and personal gain have priority over us as human beings. It is sad, but change can be made only by showing that change is wanted. I do believe people do want a change.

Human beings are said to be the highest on the evolutionary scale. We have intelligence, the ability to think, love, and care. Yet Willowbrook is testimony that we are not exercising these gifts. As seen on television, naked children are huddled on the floors and under sinks. The floor is security for them. It is stable, it will not shake, rock or move. On the floor they can hide within themselves and block out the stench, cries, shouting, and the dirt. One attendant taking care of 40 retarded children in the cafeteria is not adequate, let's face it.

We need more people to work with these children. The conditions that have been uncovered here show that we are no better than animals. At least an animal will fight for and take care of its young. I am not saying that we should make these retarded children normal. That is a miracle only God could perform. But why would we make excuses for the condition and ease our conscience by saying that nothing could be done? Why not put a little more effort into it and see what happens?

Research proves patient teaching will show results in the children. They can be taught to dress and feed themselves and other menial tasks. When taken from this education, the children regress completely and become hunched animals in the corners. Perhaps if a little love is shown, they would not react with such hate and violence that they sometimes do. There is an old saying, "You kick a dog and he will attack you or be afraid of you." How can we expect our children to react any differently when we treat them the same in denying them love and care?

I am not blaming the staff for this. I believe that the children should be given better care, which is possible only through obtaining a larger staff. I believe that the public should open its heart and take an interest in this situation and see that more is done. We do not want this to quiet down in time; we want results. There was a problem at Attica State Prison that sparked public interest for a short time. Please, let us not back down until definite results are seen. Our politicians and leaders can make promises. Let us see what kind of leadership we have by the results we get!

The hospital informs me that used clothing would be appreciated, especially for boys ages 6 to 9. If anyone is interested in donating clothing, but does not have the means, I would be happy to pick up and deliver any clothing.

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