

Willowbrook workers still up for union grabs

By REGINALD PATRICK

Come September the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA) may lose its grip on state workers if the state employees division of the Service Employees International Union, AFL-CIO, has its way.

The union is canvassing institutional and professional workers at Willowbrook State School, Creedmoor, Central Islip and other state facilities and departments in an attempt to have the CSEA decertified as bargaining agent for state workers in a late September statewide election.

John Kramer of the international said union representatives will meet with Willowbrook workers from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. today and each Thursday in coming weeks in the social hall of building 3 on the institution's grounds.

"Authorization cards" are being handed out. The cards, which must be signed and filed with the State Office of Employee Relations by the end of August, call for the September election to decide who will

represent the institutional and professional workers.

Institutional workers include attendants, aides and laundry and food service workers. The professional worker category includes registered nurses, physical therapists and psychiatrists.

Statewide, 13,500 institutional and 9,400 professional workers must submit cards before the election can be held. About 6,500 such workers and 5,000 professionals have turned in cards, so far, Kramer said.

From Willowbrook, which reportedly has about 2,000 institutional workers and 1,000 professionals a total of 700 cards have been submitted, so far.

Kramer stressed that these "authorization cards" do not denote membership in the union but are only "formal requests" for a general election. He added that if this election does materialize, all voting will be done at the various state institutions with voting machines and "not by mailed ballots." The election will be watched over by the American Honest Ballot Association or some other independent agency.

Kramer is confident of the outcome, since he claims there is a growing "disenchantment" with the CSEA among state workers for a number of reasons, particularly the "inept" handling of last April's strike against the state.

"The people at Willowbrook were literally lied to," Kramer said. "They were told they had to strike on April 1, or else they would lose their retirement benefits and various fringe benefits. They were completely misled. The state automatically

renews such benefits each year, but many workers didn't realize this at the time."

Kramer called the ultimate contract which the CSEA obtained, calling for a 4 per cent wage increase this year, "the worse public employe contract in the nation. It clearly shows that the CSEA, as a bargaining agent, is completely inadequate," he said.

The international union represents some 156,000 workers statewide Kramer said, including 25,000 hospital employes on Long Island.

Under a June 19 ruling by the state granting "access rights to employes in the professional and institutional workers units," the union is being allowed to compete for the right to bargain for institutional and professional state workers on the grounds of state institutions.