

Smith Claims Distortion On Willowbrook Articles

STATEN ISLAND—The president of the Willowbrook Developmental Center chapter, Civil Service Employees Assn., last week denounced a rash of articles appearing in the press in Albany, New York City, and Staten Island, which he called "derogatory" to the employees of that institution.

Ronnie Smith, who is also first vice-president of New York City Region 2, CSEA, directed his anger principally at an editorial in one of the papers which quoted a reporter as characterizing the employees as "an assortment of goons that would diminish the social standing of a massage parlor."

Mr. Smith referred also to a series of articles appearing in the Albany Times Union, parts of which were reprinted in the

Staten Island Advance in which reporters said they found "drunken attendants, wards without supervision, broken windows, unlocked doors and children sitting in pools of urine."

Shaking his head as he fingered the stories, Mr. Smith stated that it seems to be "open season" on Willowbrook. He said that it takes a special kind of person, one who is sympathetic, compassionate and dedicated to work in mental institutions.

Replying to the charges of drunkenness and unsanitary conditions, Mr. Smith denied that there was more drunkenness at Willowbrook than would be found in any segment of a society or community.

"Our sanitary conditions have improved and the employees take an active part in the monthly 'Carol Burnett' Banner Award given to the building with the best house-keeping record."

CSEA officials have frequently charged the state administration with cutting back on the needs of mental institutions and with not providing the funds necessary for adequate patient care and security. Recently, Federal Court Judge Orrin G. Judd signed a consent decree mandating the Willowbrook Administration to correct certain deplorable conditions.

The union president expressed shock at the lack of response from Harold Piepenbrink, recently appointed director of the Willowbrook Developmental Center, to the newspaper attacks on the employees. Mr. Smith said that Mr. Piepenbrink has been charged with the responsibility of decentralizing Willowbrook, but that "scattering" the residents throughout the five boroughs of New York City is not going to solve the problems.