

2,900 Willowbrook employes could join threatened strike

Strike would hurt Willowbrook

By LAWRENCE De MARIA

A threatened strike by the Civil Service Employees Association Monday will probably have its greatest effect at the Willowbrook Developmental Center.

Of the 4,000 employes at Willowbrook, approximately 2,900 belong to CSEA. According to Patrick Fraser, vice president of CSEA chapter local 429 at Willowbrook, early indications point towards a "positive" strike vote by his membership.

The state Legislature and Gov. Carey have refused to grant CSEA the 6 per cent across-the-board pay hike it has demanded. The Legislature last Friday approved a one-shot \$250 bonus for state workers, which works out to about a 3 per cent raise for most employes.

Carey has warned the union that he will impose the penalties of the Taylor Law if they strike, and even hinted that he might call out the National Guard as a last resort.

Last night, meanwhile, the Carey administration obtained injunctions against a possible strike by CSEA members employed by the state. The court orders, obtained in State Supreme Court in Albany, named the CSEA's statewide officers and included fictitious rank-and-file members of the huge union.

One of the papers was served upon CSEA District III vice president James Lennon while he was attending a union meeting in Poughkeepsie.

A CSEA spokesman said it was not known if other officers had yet been served. He said it was "not unusual" for the strike-ban papers to be issued before the strike vote was completed. "They did the same thing in 1972," the spokesman said, "got the court to enjoin a strike before the strike."

Spokesmen for the attorney general's office, which obtained the court orders, were not available immediately.

Fraser said that he expects the results of the union vote on the strike to be known late today. CSEA has 147,000 members statewide.

Fraser scoffed at the state's offer to CSEA. He said the state had appropriated \$36 million for 147,000 employes, which comes out to the \$250 bonus for each.

"That's 90 cents a day," he commented.

He said that the legislators "had approved \$21 million for themselves, for lulus, from May until the end of the session."

Fraser said that it was unfair that 147,000 workers got \$36 million, while "several hundred" legislators got \$21 million.

The 1972 Easter week strike, which ended when CSEA won a one-and-one-half per cent bonus and a 4 per cent pay increase, was a trauma for Willowbrook, Staten Island and the state. When the CSEA walked out, 5,000 patients, many totally helpless, were left in the lurch. Thousands of volunteers from all over the tristate area rushed to Willowbrook to help out staff and non-striking employes. A disaster was narrowly averted.

The reduced patient population of Willowbrook, now about 2,880, is not expected to deter the impact of a strike.

Joyce Libra, public relations spokesman for Willowbrook, pointed out that most of the patients discharged since 1972 could, in some way, care for themselves, while those still remaining need intensive, personal care.

An effective strike could again work great hardship on them, she explained.

"We do have an emergency manual, and we do have contingency plans in the event of a strike," Miss Libra said.

"We will assign non-direct care staff to the most vital areas and we will utilize volunteers."

There are about 400 summer and federally-funded part-time help available at Willowbrook now, and that might ease the burden somewhat.

But, Miss Libra said, she did not want to "minimize" the seriousness of a potential strike. The specter of 1972 looms large at Willowbrook.

The South Beach Psychiatric Center and the Arthur Kill Rehabilitation Center may also feel effects from a CSEA strike, but from all indications they can weather them.

H. Underwood Blajsdell, deputy director at South Beach, said that the center had "well-developed emergency plans" to cope with a CSEA strike. "since we've had several threats of this type since last spring."

He said that South Beach "will not close down."

Joseph D'Amore, vice president of the CSEA chapter at South Beach, which represents 650 of the center's 816 employes, said that if the state CSEA strikes, his membership will also. He said that such a strike at South Beach "would be very effective," and suggested that the facility would have to operate at a "minimal" level.

D'Amore added, however that the union would see to it that no life-endangering situations developed from the strike. He said plans were being made to provide for "emergency" services to the center, which serves 193 in-patients.

The Arthur Kill Rehabilitation Center has 430 employes, but less than one-quarter of them belong to CSEA.

Director Virgil Hodges said that he "really doesn't know" what the effect of a CSEA strike would be.

"Our fingers are crossed," he added.

The security staff will not be affected by a strike, since only program staff and administrative help belong to CSEA.

CSEA delegate Martin Arum said that his membership "did not want to strike, adding that there was little sympathy for the statewide union at Arthur Kill, which, he charged, had been "neglected" by the CSEA.

"To show how inefficient they are," he continued, "they told me that if the results weren't in by tomorrow to listen to the radio to find out if there was a strike."

He said that he didn't know what effect pickets thrown around the Arthur Kill facility would have.

Thus, it appears, Willowbrook is once again the center of controversy.