

Claim Whitewash By Willowbrook Administrators In Patient Death

STATEN ISLAND—Officials of the Civil Service Employees Assn. at Willowbrook Developmental Center are charging that administrators of the institution are engaged in a whitewash of top brass in an incident that resulted in the death of a resident.

Luis Ramirez, a retarded resident, was found dead in a wooded area adjacent to the administration building following a grounds search on Dec. 29. He had been missing since Dec. 24. Willowbrook administrators assert that proper procedures were not followed and that they were not notified of the missing man until Dec. 28, when his parents appeared to make inquiries about their son.

Cleophus A. Robinson, a chief of service on call duty that day, ordered a search, which was discontinued at 11:30 p.m. because of darkness. Resuming the search the next morning, Mr. Ramirez's body was found by Diane Biglilo, a searcher on horseback. Following a preliminary investigation, acting Willowbrook Director Stanley A. Slawinski suspended four employees: Whey Rhee, a nurse administrator; Rosalie Branch, a Grade 11 supervisor; James Young, a Grade 9 therapy aide, and Robert Lentz, a safety officer.

However, Ronnie Smith, president of the Willowbrook CSEA chapter, claims that the wrong employees have been suspended. He maintains that the suspension of the lowest paid employees "is an obvious attempt by the administration to take the weight off their own backs, and to make patshies of those least responsible."

Mr. Smith said that the suspended employees took appropriate action on the day Mr. Ramirez was reported missing by notifying the institution's security guard, the grounds supervisor, the local police precinct and the resident's parents by telegram. Further, Mr. Smith said, the employees had recorded in a log book that Mr. Ramirez was missing. Therefore, he said, Dr. Slawinski, who was the chief administrator on call on Dec. 24, should have made himself aware of the

missing resident. Mr. Smith also called for the suspension of those on call duty on subsequent days, prior to the finding of Mr. Ramirez's body. He said the following should be charged with negligence and dereliction of duty: Louis Siegel, chief of service on call on Dec. 25, Sherman McCoy, deputy director on call Dec. 26, and Connie Johannsen, chief of service on call Dec. 27.

"It's unconscionable that four highly paid administrators, in addition to a building team leader, knew nothing at all about a missing resident for four days. I hold them all responsible and suspendable," Mr. Smith asserted.

Pat Fraser, the chapter's grievance committee chairman, said that the union, anticipating probable disciplinary action against the suspended employees, is gathering evidence which will show that they acted properly. He insists that the administrators' own faulty communication mitigated against their being properly informed of the events leading up to the incident.

Mr. Ramirez had been a resident of Willowbrook for 13 years, and an autopsy revealed that he died of exposure. The police state that there was no evidence of foul play.