

Willowbrook teachers resist order to work 40-hour week

By ROBERT MIRALDI

About 200 teachers at Willowbrook Developmental Center, upset about proposed changes and increases in their working schedules, demonstrated yesterday afternoon in front of the facility's administration building.

Chanting "Cannon doesn't care" about the center's director, Dr. Levester Cannon, the teachers paraded through the lobby of the administration building, carrying signs and yelling slogans.

Two slogans — "8 to 5 just don't jive"

and "7 to 3 without a cup of tea" — summed up the two issues which are upsetting the center's 120 teachers and 65 teachers' assistants.

A Dec. 13 memorandum from Cannon told the teachers that on Feb. 1 they might be asked to work shifts, including weekends, instead of the routine 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. day.

Additionally, the memorandum said, the teachers, and all other professional members of Willowbrook's 4,500-member staff, will have to work a 40-hour week. The teachers have been

asked to work from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

"Traditionally," says David Bienstock, spokesman for the newly formed Willowbrook Teachers Association, "professionals, like teachers, have not considered themselves as labor."

But now, Beinstock says, the teachers are being treated like any other group in the labor market. "Cannon has waved our contract in our face," he says, "and frankly they have us over a barrel."

The teachers' contract, which is being

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Willowbrook's director, Dr. Levester Cannon, left, talks to demonstrating teachers in the lobby of the facility's administration building. The teachers were protesting longer working hours.

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Teachers and their assistants picket in front of the administration building at Willowbrook Developmental Center.

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renegotiated, has no provisions that spell out working hours. A change in traditional teachers' hours, the teachers insist, "can only serve to wreak havoc with our lives as we have built them."

In the end, the teachers feel, the 2,595 retarded residents of Willowbrook will suffer because performance in the classroom will suffer. "If I'm worrying all the time about my personal situation," Bienstock says, "how can I give my best in class?"

Explaining the reasons for the proposed changes, Cannon emphasizes that it is not just teachers who are being asked to change their programs; that all the changes might not happen and that

other teachers in state facilities have been asked to make similar changes.

Cannon says the shifts might be necessary to expand the center's education program from days to evenings. Cannon says he wants to begin an adult education program at night and will need teachers. "We would try to get volunteers first," he says.

Cannon says that the state is attempting to make all employees work a 40-hour week. A teacher's day would consist of six hours in the classroom, one hour in the morning for consultations, and one hour after class for "professional time."

The professional time is usually off the center's grounds and, more often than not, it is leisure time off for the

teachers. "It will no longer be a carte blanche hour off," Cannon says.

The teachers insist they are being treated differently than other teachers who work with mentally retarded persons. They say teachers in city schools make more money, work shorter days and have more preparation periods.

Teachers' salaries at Willowbrook range from about \$9,600 to \$14,700.

The teachers say they are not now considering a strike, but they are not hopeful that their union, the Civil Service Employees Association, will provide much help.

"Services to the residents will have to be downgraded," Bienstock says. "And already a number of teachers have begun to look around for other jobs."