

# Willowbrook staff set to fight takeover

By SYDNEY FREEDBERG

An army of dissatisfied state workers serving Willowbrook Developmental Center apparently is poised to do battle next month with the new, privately hired staff.

Union leaders disclosed yesterday they are polling their membership to establish if there is sentiment for an institutionwide walkout Sept. 5, the day the state plans to surrender authority over seven center buildings to the United Cerebral Palsy Associations.

The ballot asks members to endorse a strike, a sickout or a demonstration — moves apparently designed to stall the public-to-private transition.

"We will not give in on this issue," Felton King, president of the local representing Willowbrook workers, told 200 members during a union meeting yesterday.

"Our jobs are at stake and our back is being forced against the wall," King said, adding that the state has no cohesive plan for the redeployment of 700 workers who will lose their current posts to UCP's private staff.

King's statement came just minutes after the departure from the center's grounds of Democratic mayoral candidate Bella S. Abzug, who picked up the

backing of giant Local 479 of the Civil Service Employees Association, the bargaining unit for 4,500 Willowbrook workers.

With King and other union leaders, Mrs. Abzug toured the baby complex, which is to be the heart of the privately run center. The complex houses approximately 450 mentally retarded children, said to receive the best care Willowbrook has to offer.

King briefed Mrs. Abzug on the takeover during their walk. She was careful not to take a position. She greeted state workers assigned to the buildings and took the hands of some mentally retarded children, mostly unaware of the guest in their midst.

She addressed the union members and then, in return for their support, pledged to "bring your concern to the attention of the governor and the commissioner of the Department of Mental Hygiene."

But while the former congresswoman from Manhattan stressed that every state worker "should be guaranteed job security," she stopped shy of endorsing the union's headline opposition to the private takeover.

"I am not the governor and I am not

(Continued on Page 4)



Felton King, president of Willowbrook's union, briefs mayoral hopeful Bella Abzug on the private takeover of seven outbuildings at the center.

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