

Willowbrook workers demonstrate to save jobs

State workers at the Willowbrook Developmental Center continued to fight yesterday an all-but-certain takeover of seven center buildings during a demonstration outside the United Cerebral Palsy Associations' Manhattan headquarters.

Approximately 350 attendants, therapists and teachers left Willowbrook's quiet enclaves, traveling by bus to the midtown area to protest a move they've been saying will result in loss of jobs and security.

Joined by mental health workers from

other state institutions, the angry Willowbrook workers carried signs saying "UCP out of Willowbrook now" and "Carey, keep us off the welfare lines."

The protesters set up a picket line outside UCP's executive offices at 815 Second Ave., forcing Robert Schonhorn, the private group's director, to turn away all visitors during the day.

A score of Midtown South police officers were on hand to keep peace in the most solid and visible show of opposition to the takeover so far.

The workers vowed to continue the demonstrations until the Department of Mental Hygiene reneges on a deal that gives the private palsy group authority over seven Willowbrook buildings as well as staff hiring and firing responsibility in those buildings.

Some employees, members of the Civil Service Employees Association, vowed to walk off their jobs Sept. 8, the day UCP is expected to move in.

Others favored locking the private staff out of the buildings. Still others said they'd call in sick that day.

But unanimously, they resolved to fight the takeover to the end, maintaining they're just as qualified as the private staff to treat Willowbrook's mentally retarded.

"Besides," one Building 14 worker at yesterday's demonstration said, "we've been with the residents for years, and it's unfair to them."

The Department of Mental Hygiene has insisted since the court-mandated takeover was agreed to that no Willowbrook employee will lose his job when the state surrenders control of the buildings. The department says approximately 700 workers in the affected buildings will be given new assignments come Sept. 8.

The mental hygiene agency, however, refuses to make a commitment to the workers for 1978 and beyond.



Willowbrook workers demonstrate along Second Ave. in Manhattan. S.I. Advance Photo by Robert Parsons