

Willowbrook employes to fight UCP takeover of 7 buildings

Some Willowbrook Developmental Center workers are seeking to undermine a private takeover of seven center buildings planned for Thursday, a federal judge was told yesterday.

The state employes, fearful of losing their jobs to privately hired staff, have threatened to lock the United Cerebral Palsy Associations of New York out of buildings the voluntary group intends to operate, two attorneys alleged during a hearing in Brooklyn Federal Court.

The attorneys — one representing the state Department of Mental Hygiene, the other, UCP — also charged that certain civil servants have resorted to vandalism on the grounds of the 384-acre institution as a way to impede the intended takeover.

Glen Rickles, the attorney for UCP, asked Federal Court Judge John R. Bartels to enjoin the Civil Service Employees Association "from participating in these disruptive activities and these threats."

Turning to Pauline Rogers, the attorney

representing the union, Bartels asked, "Do you know about these incidents of vandalism?"

"No, your honor, I do not," Mrs. Rogers responded.

"If you do, you know, you ought to put a stop to it, tell...your members not to do that," Bartels said.

The judge paused and added: "Anyone who has a drop of milk of human kindness would not do that to those poor retarded people out there."

Bartels then told Rickles that he could not consider restraining the union from the alleged activities until the proper papers had been drawn by an attorney. He urged Mrs. Rogers to communicate to Willowbrook workers that "such activities are illegal."

Staten Island police reported yesterday they had received no complaints of alleged vandalism at the institution, and a spokesman for Willowbrook's union said such tactics were not condoned.

Yesterday's hearing before Bartels was called in an attempt to smooth over serious labor problems that have arisen out of the planned takeover.

The union claims the state's agreement to surrender to UCP seven center buildings violates state law. The workers fear that some of the 700 employes affected will lose their jobs to UCP-hired staff.

The state, represented at yesterday's hearing by assistant attorney generals Robert Hammer, William Carnahan and

Paul Stavis, argued the union's law suit represents a "serious threat...prejudices the progress we're trying to make at Willowbrook."

Hammer, pointing to the terms of a 1975 federal court order establishing the constitutional rights of the retarded, said that as Willowbrook residents are released to community facilities, "there will undoubtedly be layoffs." But the mental hygiene agency, he insisted, plans to dismiss no one for two years.

The idea to give UCP operational control over part of the developmental center was agreed to by Bartels in March. It was mandated a way to improve conditions there by bringing the institution down to a more manageable size.

There are 2,400 residents who live at the center now, 641 of whom would be cared for by the private organization under the planned takeover. A court order requires Willowbrook to reduce its population to 250 by 1981.

Bartels said a series of jurisdictional questions brought before his court would be decided today. In a reference to the takeover dispute, he insisted: "Somebody's not acting too reasonably. You're all not acting cool. These talks of strikes, it's all a lot of nonsense.

"We have the same identical interests," Bartels said, "those poor, helpless retarded children out there on Staten Island."

— SYDNEY FREEDBERG