

# U.S. judge reserves decision on bid to bar a work stoppage at Willowbrook

Brooklyn Federal Court Judge John R. Bartels yesterday reserved decision on a state motion that asks him to sign an order barring as illegal a threatened work stoppage at Willowbrook Developmental Center.

Elin M. Howe, Willowbrook's acting director, and Thomas A. Coughlin, deputy commissioner of the Department of Mental Hygiene, testified at the hearing in Brooklyn Federal Court that a strike by state institutional workers would "threaten the lives" of the center's 2,380 retarded residents.

But attorneys for the Civil Service Employees Association, the union representing 4,000 Willowbrook employees, failed to attend the hearing, saying state officials had informed them of it only 10 minutes before it occurred.

Felton King, president of Willowbrook's chapter of the CSEA, said that

while workers remain upset over the transfer of seven buildings with 640 residents to the private United Cerebral Palsy Association, he has not yet set a date for a job action and "I don't know what all the fuss is about."

King maintained that he is willing to "sit down and talk about the problem," but that state officials were unwilling to rescind or alter the court-mandated takeover, which directly affects the job status of an estimated 700 Willowbrook workers.

Strikes by public workers are forbidden under the state's Taylor Law, which says striking workers could be docked two days pay for each day out.

Coughlin, who Wednesday revealed that some Willowbrook employees stand to lose their jobs in the next year, agreed to refrain from any layoffs during the next month to permit litigation of the union's protest.

Under current projections, according

to Coughlin, 1,130 of 4,600 workers must be taken off the payroll by next March 31. Resignations or attritions, he said, will probably account for 900 of those employees, leaving the future of 200 in doubt.

Coughlin's revelation about prospective layoffs at the institution was viewed as a bombshell by representatives of the union, UCP and the parents, all of whom believed there would be no reduction in Willowbrook's work force for the next two fiscal years.

In other Willowbrook developments, State Sen. John Marchi of Ward Hill yesterday urged Gov. Carey to arrive at a settlement of the state's dispute with the CSEA over the takeover.

He also called on the union to refrain from engaging in a strike and urged mental hygiene officials to place a moratorium on job layoffs pending settlement of the controversy.

He said the Legislature should consid-

er legislation that would provide greater flexibility to DMH in relocating employees faced with layoff.

Marchi also suggested that Willowbrook be given priority in allocation of funds now available to re-train institutional workers for jobs in community-based facilities, where Willowbrook residents are now being relocated.

"Within the ranks of the employees now confronted with layoff," Marchi said, "there are men and women dedicated to and skilled in treatment of the mentally retarded. Any solution to the problem before us should rightfully include use of the conscientious attitude and tested skills of these employees."

In making his appeal, Marchi said he was by no means seeking to intrude on the powers of the state or federal courts, both of which are passing on the validity of the takeover agreement.

— SYDNEY FREDBERG