

# Willowbrook: A struggle lost in a fight over a battle

By SYDNEY FREEDBERG

A parent with a child at the Willowbrook Developmental Center insists the place is plagued by a terminal form of bureaucratic cancer: The more the confusing cast of players struggles to improve conditions there, the more impossibly debilitated the place becomes.

It's not that these somewhat tragic-

## Analysis

omic protagonists don't try, this mother explains. It's just that the point and meaning of the fight, as in existential drama, often seem to get lost in the fighting itself.

What's being fought for, we must occasionally be reminded, is the right of a faultlessly helpless people — the retarded of Willowbrook and other state institutions — to more meaningful lives through special treatment, activity and love.

The most recent controversy at Willowbrook, then — over the surrender of seven buildings to the private United Cerebral Palsy Association — is just another in a long list of attempted trial remedies to achieve that stubbornly elusive goal.

The takeover itself stemmed from a court-invoked plan in March, more than four years after the federal court system took the matter of "Willowbrook warehousing" into its own hands.

And today, after years of delays and broken promises, Willowbrook, which once packed away more than 5,000, has at least reduced its population to 2,380 residents.

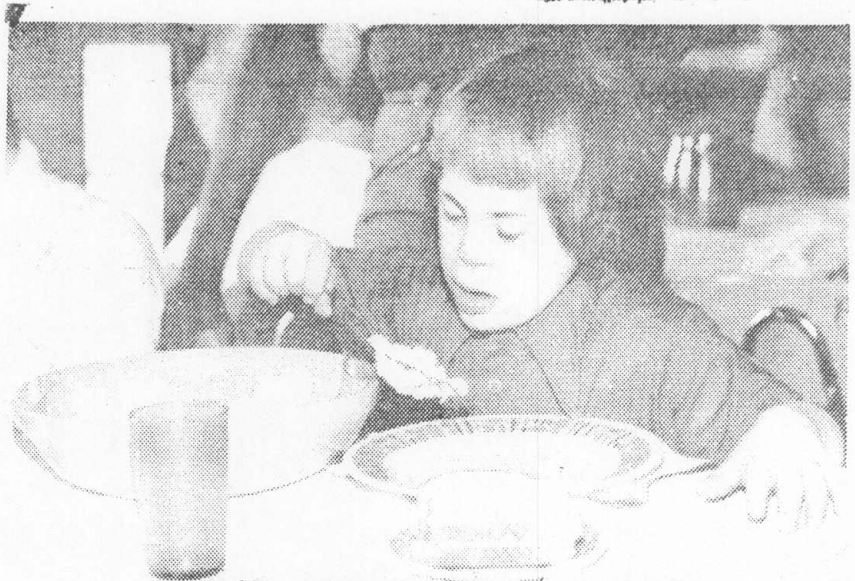
But while many argue that Willowbrook must be expunged, the official goal remains to get the census down to

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Willowbrook workers protest...

S.I. Advance Photo by Robert Parsons



...and a Willowbrook child learns to feed himself.

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