

Public employees vs. private workers

In a ruling that could have far-reaching consequences for our city and other local governments throughout the state, the state Court of Appeals has upheld the right of a municipality to discharge tenured civil service employees so that their functions may be contracted out to private business concerns.

The case before the court involved the dismissal of nine security guards who worked for Westchester County and were assigned to the county medical center. After firing the workers the county contracted with a private concern for security service, contending it would save substantial sums of money by doing so.

The action was challenged by the state Civil Service Employees Asso-

ciation, but the court found earlier this week that the county had not acted improperly. The county's action was acceptable, the court ruled, so long as the private security guards reported to their own employer, and not to county officials.

The issue of the contracting out of public services to private concerns is not unique to Westchester. Here on Staten Island we've seen the state turn over responsibility for care of the mentally retarded to a private organization, United Cerebral Palsy, despite protests from the CSEA.

Programs such as that one, which seem to work, have led some government officials to speculate that the widespread contracting out of services might be desirable. Cost

advantages stem from the fact that governments need not pay private workers the same costly fringe and pension benefits required for public employees.

Nevertheless, here in New York we've discovered that some private concerns — such as those that have held the city's street lighting contract — have reaped exorbitant profits from the municipal treasury while providing only erratic service.

There are both pros and cons to the issue, to be sure, but we urge local governments to avoid the temptation to rush toward the contracting of services because of the court ruling. Dollars must not be the only consideration; common sense is important, too.

Families do care for own retarded

This letter is being written in partial response to a letter by Winifred McCourt in the "It's your opinion" column of June 16.

Ms. McCourt had spoken about the need for Willowbrook, and with most of her sentiments I agree.

However, ignored, unsung and completely disregarded are the many families on Staten Island who have raised and cared for their own retarded children without any utterances of piety — without any demands for state programs to help them — without any requests for aid from any group or organization!

These independent people have accepted their child and have loved him or her. They have been — and are today — meeting their obligations and responsi-

bilities without banal requests for increased state aid. These persons are not marching in the streets, nor are they standing in front of television cameras at Willowbrook Developmental Center demanding better treatment for mentally retarded people.

Instead, these mothers and fathers are at home, tending to the needs of their Exceptional Children.

Are programs available for the non-vocal among us?

I ask for public statements from our local politicians in response to this question.

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