

Developmental Center workers may strike despite panel accord

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ALBANY — A Staten Island union leader said yesterday that a strike by state workers is still possible despite a new agreement to resolve contract differences through binding arbitration.

Felton King, president of the 3,500-member Staten Island Developmental Center chapter of the Civil Service Employees Association, said he would not hesitate to lead his workers out on strike if the arbitration panel fails to provide an adequate wage package and guarantees of job security to employees at the Willowbrook institution.

Sources close to the negotiations report both sides are close to agreeing to a 7 percent salary increase for state workers to conform to President Carter's inflation guidelines.

Under the new procedures, agreed to yesterday, the state and CSEA will submit unresolved issues to a panel of arbitrators. The panel would select the last best offer of either the state or CSEA in order to resolve the deadlock.

Meyer "Sandy" Frucher, director of the Office of Employee Relations, said the new agreement virtually eliminate the threat of a strike by 107,000 state workers when their contract expires in April. But King disagreed.

"A strike is now illegal under the Taylor Law," King said. "And that hasn't stopped us in the past and neither will this agreement. I will not accept a settlement that isn't fair to the employees at Willowbrook."

Barry Markman, third vice president of the South Beach Psychiatric Center chapter of CSEA, said his 900 members were opposed to the procedure, known as last offer binding arbitration.

"First of all it takes away the ratification process and I believe that is in-

herently undemocratic," Markman said. "And if we do go on strike, public sentiment will be against us because we will be violating our own agreements."

Markman said that while the state Legislature was responsible for the Taylor Law, this agreement was approved by the CSEA. "Now we're the ones who said we won't strike, not the state Legislature, and there is a big difference," he said.

The new procedures differ from present arbitration procedures in effect for firemen and police. Under that arbitration provision of the Taylor Law, an arbitrator may issue an award that is, in effect, a compromise between the extreme positions of the employer and union involved.

Under the new setup, an arbitrator may only select between the employer's or the union's final offer. Therefore, Frucher said, both parties have an incentive to propose more acceptable resolutions to differences in the negotiations.

William L. McGowan, state CSEA president, said the new procedures are a vast improvement over provisions under the Taylor Law, which provided for a legislative hearing to resolve contract deadlocks.

That procedure allowed the legislative body that the union had been negotiating against to unilaterally impose terms and conditions of employment on public workers, McGowan said.

King said job security remains a very important issue at the Staten Island Developmental Center as the state continues a policy of reducing the center's population, once more from 6,000 to a goal of 250 by 1980. The issue became even more heated when the state in Sept. 1977 signed a contract with United Cerebral Palsy to run programs at seven residential centers at the vast institution.