

Developmental Center is quiet again after workers end protest

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Protesting workers halted their ear-splitting demonstration in the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook, yesterday just as police, equipped with helmets and clubs, prepared to arrest them.

"Troops, let's march on . . . peacefully," declared Felton King, union leader for the 20 employees who had drawn into a tight circle in the lobby of the institution's administration building, pounding rhythmically on trash cans and pots with bats and sticks.

Speaking through a bullhorn, King thus directed his members out of the building shortly before 4:30 p.m., ending a continuous five-day vigil by the workers, sparked by the institutions docking of three days' pay for 371 employees. He said the workers had gotten the point across."

The withholding of pay stemmed from a reported sickout which center officials and some workers said occurred between July 24 and 27. The reported job action was to protest cuts in staffing levels at Willowbrook, which is being phased out under a 1974 court order.

With a short pep talk, King, who is president of Local 429 of the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA), ordered the latest action ended minutes after the demonstrators saw police officers from the 122nd Precinct, carrying helmets and clubs, walk past them up the steps to the second floor of the building.

There they conferred in a room, opposite the offices of the director and deputy director of the institution who, behind closed doors, reportedly stayed in phone contact with their superiors in the state mental hygiene agency.

The police had been called in as a backup to assist in case of violence against Willowbrook's peace-officer force, who would have made the arrests. Seven of them sat or stood on the balcony of the second floor overlooking the demonstration, awaiting orders.

Albany officials told the Advance earlier in the day that their strategy