

Willowbrook workers picket Trade Center

Brandishing placards accusing state officials of union busting and racism, nearly 100 workers from the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook, and other state-run mental retardation facilities staged a peaceful demonstration yesterday at noon outside the World Trade Center, Manhattan.

Standing in the middle of the oval-shaped procession was Felton King,



Felton King, president of the union, leads the chants during a demonstration in Lower Manhattan.

union chief of non-professional employees at the Staten Island Developmental Center, whose suspension without pay and banishment from the Willowbrook institution a week ago is the most severe development in a string of labor-management confrontations there this summer.

Calling through a bullhorn, King led chants of "Elin Howe, sever her" and "Jim Shea, sever him." Miss Howe is the director and Shea her deputy at the developmental center.

It was the first time the Staten Island dispute had been taken to a broader public arena. The demonstration, according to King, was an offshoot of a regional meeting last weekend of representatives of the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA), who had voted to support the grievances of the Willowbrook workers.

In addition to King, all but one other union officer and nearly 20 union members at the institution have been issued notices of discipline or suspension by the state for their participation in alleged job actions.

"The administration is using dividing tactics to cover up their incompetency," King charged yesterday.

Noting that the majority of Willowbrook CSEA members are black or Hispanic — as reflected by the demonstrators — King has accused the state of playing tough for racist reasons.

Shea was in the World Trade Center offices of the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities while the union marched outside yesterday. He had entered on the opposite side of the tower, bypassing the workers.

Told of the slogans on signs 56 floors below, such as "Racism to Willowbrook is like food to a cook," Shea said: "We have looked at this as a labor issue. Unfortunately, they have turned it into a racial one. Race issues are very emotional and



Taking their grievance into Manhattan, non-professional employees of the Staten Island Developmental Center picket outside the World Trade Center against what they term "union busting." S.I. Advance Photos by Robert Parsons

very hard to deal with."

King's suspension, authorized by state mental retardation Commissioner James E. Introne and the Governor's Office of Employee Relations, arose directly from his role in a sit-down strike at the institution Aug. 21-25. He is accused of masterminding the job action, in which about 100 union members occupied the institution's administration building.

The sit-down strike was held to protest the docking of one to four days' pay for 371 workers absent in mid-July during what the institu-

tion's administration has deemed an illegal sickout.

During both incidents, King and workers under his leadership accused the state of failing to respond to their complaints of short-staffing at the developmental center — a condition center administrators vehemently deny.

The protesting CSEA members are assigned primarily to such basic services as washing, feeding and dressing the institution's 1,100 mentally retarded residents.

State officials have declined to discuss the nature of the charges brought against King and other union officers and members at the institution, except to say that they stem from the two alleged job actions. The charges, along with suspensions meted out so far, will be reviewed by an outside arbitrator at an as-yet unscheduled date.