

# Willowbrook: No Bed of Roses

By TIMOTHY LEE

"I love these children, but maybe that just means I feel sorry for them," said Mrs. Van-gelia Nelson, a ward attendant at Willowbrook State School for the mentally retarded. "Some of them are beasts, so you can't be nice to them. But the longer I'm here the more I love them."

Mrs. Nelson, who lives at 115 Andros Av., Richmond, has been an attendant at the hospital for the last seven years.

Like the rest of the staff she calls the patients "children" even though the age range of the 72 females in her ward is from 9 to 60.

## Union Gripes

"There aren't many nice things that have happened to me out here," she said. "Two weeks ago a camisole (strait-jacket) patient knocked me down, and when she saw I was hurt she said she was sorry. I guess that's nice, but it's not much, either."

Mrs. Nelson had attended a meeting of the State, County and Municipal Employees Council 50, where the members talked of being understaffed, overworked and underpaid.

"I know their grievances and I know they're true," said Dr. Jack Hammond, director of the school. "No one denies the conditions here more than I do. But there is a difference between criticizing and getting something done."

Hammond said in nine of the

buildings where 2,500 of the school's 6,000 patients are kept there is 100 per cent overcrowding, but there is no place else to put the patients. In the next few days the school will receive 30 new pieces of recreational therapy equipment, he said, but he has not been able to recruit recreational therapists to make full use of them.

"Sometimes you get so annoyed with cleaning up after the children you just have to walk out of the ward," said Robert DeGroot, an attendant with five years' experience.

"But when you go in and they cheer you and clap and know your name, well that's something else. I've got beefs about conditions, but not about the children."