Willowbrook Union Chiefs Air Employe Gripes

By MARK WIESNER

Sen. Robert F. Kennedy's blast at conditions in Willowbrook State School was used as a sounding board by representatives of a union representing employes to parade their grievances yesterday.

Reports had circulated of a mass, day-long rally of dissatisfied employes at which Kennedy's charges would be discussed.

But yesterday morning only three officials of New York Employes Council 50, AFL-CIO, were present in the employes' lounge of Building 60.

They said they agreed with Kennedy's charges but said low-ranking employes were being made scapegoats in the public eye for the failings of others.

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THE OFFICIALS were Joseph Callahan, president of Local 1184, the Willowbrook chapter, and Milton Michaels and Joseph Wilson, representative and secretary of the council, respectively.

They said at an earlier meeting attended by seven persons, they had uncovered a situation so extreme that they tried to bring it to the attention of the administration immediately, but they were denied.

They also spoke of the low pay of their members, who are attendants and maintenance and kitchen workers, the "Teutonic" manner in which they were handled by the professional staff and the inadequacies of the administration.

But the rumors of demonstrations by Willowbrook employes produced results as newsmen and television crews began to arrive at the institution.

The Department of Mental Hygiene decided to bar reporters from talking with the union chiefs while on the grounds, because it would cause trouble with the other two unions at Willowbrook. Interviews, for the most part, were conducted on Victory Blvd., outside the institution.

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UNION OFFICIALS also sniped at the "palatial" living of doctors running the state institutions and charged that attendants were forced to do work unrelated to patient care.

Dr. Jack Hammond, Willowbrook director, was asked about the charge the men say they sought to bring to his attention. This involved awakening children at midnight to shift them to another ward so they would not be unattended.

"If they told their members to show up for work when they are due, this sort of thing wouldn't happen," Hammond commented.

Hammond showed a letter which indicated that the union and the administration had agreed prior to Sen. Kennedy's remarks to allow the union to conduct the series of meetings.