

2 workers reinstated in Willowbrook

By JANE KURTIN

Dr. Michael Wilkins and Mrs. Elizabeth Lee, fired 23 days ago from their jobs at Willowbrook State School, will be back at work soon.

At a conference last night in Manhattan between representatives of the Benevolent Society of Willowbrook and Dr. Alan D. Miller, commissioner of the State Department of Mental Hygiene, an announcement was made indicating that the two will be reinstated following a meeting with Dr. Jack Hammond, director of the institution.

The statement, prepared jointly by the Benevolent Society and the Department of Mental Hygiene said that it has been "agreed to work at a reconciliation between Dr. Jack Hammond and Dr. Michael Wilkins and Mrs. Elizabeth Lee which will lead to their reinstatement at Willowbrook."

Despite three stormy weeks during which spokesman for the Department of Mental Hygiene steadfastly refused to consider rehiring Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee at Willowbrook, parents groups signed petitions and held press conferences and just as adamantly demanded that the two "dedicated employees" come back to work at the institution.

Observers see the decision as an important step toward parental control over Willowbrook and other state institutions.

DROPS DEMAND FOR

Apparently in return for the concession by the Department of Mental Hygiene, the Benevolent Society has withdrawn its demand that Dr. Hammond be fired.

The dismissal of Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee, which was activated Jan. 5 after the two were active in publicizing critical conditions at Willowbrook and organizing parents groups to push for reform, was followed by a great deal of confusion on the part of the Department of Mental Hygiene.

While there were no stipulations to their dismissal, Dr. Frederic Grunberg, deputy commissioner of the department, responded to public uproar over the firings by saying that the two employees would be kept on the payroll although they couldn't work at Willowbrook.

Grunberg met with Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee in Manhattan several days after the terminations and said that they could have other jobs within the department, exclusive of work at Willowbrook. His offer was rejected by the two employees and by parents groups.

GOT NOTICE

Within a week after they refused to accept any jobs but the ones they had held at Willowbrook, Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee received notice that they had been removed from the payroll. Grunberg indicated that their unwillingness to take new jobs had been interpreted as unwillingness to work for the Department of Mental Hygiene in any capacity.

Dr. Hammond, who received notice of the impending reinstatement of the doctor and social worker at 4 a.m. today, reiterated a previous statement of

his willingness to comply with the wishes of the department.

"I have always worked in the best interest of the patients at Willowbrook," Dr. Hammond said, "and if the Department should feel it necessary to supersede my authority I would, within the framework of my operation, cooperate with its wishes."

"Now," Dr. Hammond continued, "I feel that it is most important that we try to achieve a harmonious working relationship with all the virtually interested parties so we can get on with the business at hand and care for the patients as best we can."

Both Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee were greatly relieved to be going back to work but said that their reinstatement did not mean that all was well at Willowbrook.