

Willowbrook aides rally for Hammond

By JANE KURTIN

Responding to a rumor that Dr. Jack Hammond, director of Willowbrook State School, had been fired, more than 100 employees occupied the administration building yesterday demanding their director's authority not be undermined.

The protest stemmed from an all-night meeting between members of the Benevolent Society of Willowbrook and Dr. Alan D. Miller, commissioner of the Department of Mental Hygiene, at which it was agreed that a reconciliation would be attempted between Dr. Hammond and Dr. Michael Wilkins and Mrs. Elizabeth Lee.

Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee, who had been fired from their positions Jan. 5 allegedly because of their part in publicizing conditions at the institution, were to meet with Dr. Hammond yesterday to discuss the terms of their rehiring.

The meeting, however, was blocked by employees who saw the reinstatement of the two employees as a move to oust Hammond from his position of authority at Willowbrook.

In the course of the demonstration, employees criticized press coverage of Willowbrook, claiming that condemnation of the institution's treatment of patients reflected badly on them.

Also, employees resented the recent intervention of parents of patients who are demanding partial control over the firing and hiring at Willowbrook.

On the assumption that Dr. Hammond had been fired, employees asked: "If they (the parents) can do something like that to the director, think what they could do to us."

"Any time parents decide they don't like one of the employees," said Willa Mae Thompson "they could just get rid of them like they're trying to do to Dr. Hammond."

When Dr. Hammond appeared at the administration building for his scheduled appointment with Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee, a social worker, he was greeted with cheers and a chant of "We want Dr. Hammond."

An Advance reporter, charged with "starting the whole thing," was booed and for a short time prevented from leaving the administration building by employees who insisted that she go to Albany with a delegation of workers to demand that Dr. Hammond remain as director and that Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee not be reinstated.

Employees were particularly resentful of parents who they claimed "Have just begun to take an interest in their children."

"Some of the people who are demanding control of Willowbrook are people who haven't even visited their kids in years," one remarked.

"Instead of carrying signs and marching around in front of the buildings," an attendant said, "why aren't those volunteers coming on the wards to help keep the kids clean and feed them?"

Representatives of various departments within the institution demanded that they be credited with doing as much work for the patients as is humanly possible.

"Why don't the newspapers and the televisions ever come in and do stories about the great things the employees do for the patients?" an attendant asked.

"While we're changing the diapers and making the beds, the parents are outside screaming for someone to change everything. They belong inside with their kids if they're so anxious to help. We never had one of them offer to help with the laundry."

About two hours after many workers left their stations to give support to Dr. Hammond in the administration building, Willowbrook State School buses pulled up and nearly all the

demonstrators piled in for the ride to Albany and the hoped for confrontation with Dr. Miller.

Employees said that they felt that Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee did not do their jobs well and were responsible "for dividing the employees and causing lots of problems."

In Supreme Court yesterday, Justice John A. Garbarino granted the state attorney general's office an extension until next Thursday to prepare new guidelines governing the relationship of staff members and parent groups at Willowbrook.

On Jan. 20, the state attorney general, representing the school, agreed to rescind a controversial memorandum issued last Dec. 3 by Dr. Hammond, prohibiting staff members from meeting with parent groups on school grounds without authorization, either during regular or off hours. The judge, however, granted the state permission to draw up the new guidelines.