

Employees protest re hiring of 2

While testimony was being heard about Willowbrook State School at a Manhattan hearing yesterday, a crowd of about 1,000 employees held a rally at the institution.

Posters appeared throughout Willowbrook proclaiming: Your Job at Stake — Attend Rally — 2 p.m. Building 3 — Wilkins and Lee Out — Let's Keep It That Way."

The signs referred to Dr. Michael Wilkins and Mrs. Elizabeth Lee, who were fired Jan. 5 because of their differences with Dr. Jack Hammond, director of Willowbrook, and their part in publicizing conditions at the institution.

Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee, who received no advance notice of their dismissals, were told several days after parents protested Dr. Hammond's action that they had a choice between working at an institution other than Willowbrook or leaving the Department of Mental Hygiene.

Parents continued to demand the reinstatement of Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee and, after a meeting between representatives of the Department of Mental Hygiene and the Benevolent Society of Willowbrook, it was announced that a reconciliation between the director and the two ousted employees was planned and would lead to their rehiring.

Protests by about 200 employees blocked a meeting of Dr. Wilkins, Mrs. Lee and Dr. Hammond, and three busloads of Willowbrook employees left their jobs for a spontaneous

trip to Albany where they demanded of Dr. Alan D. Miller, commissioner of the department, that the two workers not be rehired.

Rumors spread through the institution and the consensus was that Dr. Hammond's reconciliation with Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee was a first move toward diminishing powers of the director and eventually removing him from his position.

Dr. Hammond and spokesmen for the Department of Mental Hygiene denied that the suggested reconciliation was an indication of the director's replacement, but employees were

unconvinced and continued to threaten job actions if Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee returned to work.

Copies of an anonymous note aimed at discrediting Dr. Wilkins and another staff physician at Willowbrook — and described as "bilge" by a spokesman for the Department of Mental Hygiene — were run off on duplicating machines in the administration building at Willowbrook and distributed.

Because of the rally yesterday, all classes for residents at Willowbrook State School were canceled at 2 p.m.

Most of the employees who attended the rally were reportedly not authorized to leave their stations in the institution.

Dr. Hammond, who appeared briefly at the rally, requested the employees to return to work, he said.

"I urged the employees to avoid any irresponsible behavior at this rally and at all other times and to remember that their first responsibility was to the patients," he said later.

The rally lasted for slightly more than an hour and another was staged in the evening.

During the afternoon session, it was reported, feelings were strongly against the reinstatement of Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee. The evening rally reportedly was marked by a round of applause when one worker praised the two employees as being "the best thing that's happened to Willowbrook."