

State denies Hammond going

By JANE KURTIN

The state Department of Mental Hygiene has "categorically denied" that Dr. Jack Hammond will be fired from his position as director of Willowbrook State School.

Gene Eisner, a labor attorney, teacher at Cornell University's Labor Relations School and counsel for Dr. Michael Wilkins and Mrs. Elizabeth Lee, claims that he was told Dr. Hammond's days at Willowbrook are numbered.

Eisner, who met Jan. 29 with Dr. Alan D. Miller, commissioner of the state agency, to discuss the possible reinstatement of the two employees, said that Dr. Miller spoke to him of Dr. Hammond's performance as director of Willowbrook during a conversation in the kitchen of the commissioner's office.

Eisner said that Dr. Miller, Dr. Frederic Grunberg, deputy commissioner of the department, Dr. Wilkins, and Mrs. Lee and Ira Fischer, both social workers, attended the marathon meeting in Miller's office.

"Dr. Miller," Eisner said, "told me that he invited Wilkins and Lee to meet with him so he could get a better understanding of what type of people they are.

"I said I thought that it was given that they were fine people and Dr. Miller said that that was not given."

"Dr. Miller said he had heard

that Dr. Wilkins and Lee were radicals, but added 'some of my best friends are radicals — even I'm a radical,'" Eisner recalled.

"Dr. Miller said that he had checked me out," Eisner said, "and that my reputation was 'splendid' and that I was a fine lawyer.

Miller, Eisner said, confided that he had a dilemma on his hands with Willowbrook and didn't know the way out of it.

"At this point in the conversation," Eisner said, "we were both standing in the kitchen and Dr. Miller was cutting cheese and making coffee. Dr. Miller asked what I suggested about Willowbrook.

"I told Miller that in my opinion he and the department were at a critical juncture in the department's history.

'STEP BACKWARDS'

"You call yourself a progressive," Eisner said he told Miller "and say that you are doing and would like to continue doing good. But unless you honor the agreement you made Thursday night that Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee be reinstated, and don't cave in to reactionary forces at work, aided and abetted by Drs. Hammond, Sternlicht and Jacobs, you will have taken an historic step backwards."

(Eisner referred to the agreement to rehire the two after a reconciliation with Dr. Hammond and the subsequent demonstration for which Willowbrook State School buses

were used for a trip to Albany by protesters and anti-Wilkins leaflets were printed on an institution copying machine.)

"Dr. Miller told me," Eisner continued, "that all he could say was that he was trying to do something.

"At this point," Eisner said, "Dr. Miller told me he recognized that Dr. Hammond was running a terrible administration at Willowbrook and, as a matter of fact, that it had already been arranged that Dr. Hammond would be leaving."

KNOWN TO HAMMOND?

Eisner said that he asked Dr. Miller if Dr. Hammond knew this and was assured that he did.

"But Dr. Miller told me," Eisner went on, "that he was concerned if he ordered the reinstatement of Wilkins and Lee at this time and at the same time removed Dr. Hammond, it would be a terrible thing to do to Dr. Hammond.

"Dr. Miller told me that Dr. Hammond had given a lifetime of devoted service and that he would like to be able to allow him to leave with dignity."

Eisner claimed he questioned Dr. Miller's judgment in allowing workers to believe that Dr. Hammond was being pushed out of office because of the Wilkins-Lee issue, when it had all been prearranged.

"Dr. Miller," Eisner said, "told me that he didn't know what he was going to do and I told Dr. Miller that I would be watching him carefully."