

State loosens grip on Willowbrook tomorrow

By SYDNEY FREDBERG

State officials are expected to surrender sovereignty tomorrow over a portion of Willowbrook Developmental Center, giving a private organization a shot at wiping away the misery that seems to persist there under public control.

The unprecedented arrangement, providing for the transfer of care and treatment of 641 retarded residents to the private staff of United Cerebral Palsy Associations of New York, becomes official at 9 a.m., when approximately 700 UCP-hired workers are to prepare for new job roles in seven center buildings.

But the transition, like the four months of contract negotiations that preceded it, will doubtless be far from

smooth.

For tomorrow's planned takeover, seen as a remedy to some of the problems that plague any institution Willowbrook's size, will mean the dislodging of approximately 700 state workers, many of whom have been assigned to the affected buildings for years.

Spokesmen for Willowbrook and the state Department of Mental Hygiene, the institution's operating agency, said yesterday that attendants, therapists and professionals affected in the takeover have been given new job assignments in other Willowbrook facilities, to which they are expected to report Saturday.

But the workers, upset over a deal they say has left their future as civil servants in jeopardy, have vowed to

give the private group trouble despite the state's word that no one will be laid off at Willowbrook for the next two years.

In a last ditch effort to get the state to renege, Felton King, president of Willowbrook's local of the Civil Service Employees Association, is leading several busloads of institutional workers to Albany today to protest an agreement they say was made under a veil of secrecy.

If the demonstration proves fruitless, King said, "We will have to resort to other measures."

Although King declined to reveal just what those measures might be, the union leader said last week that 90 per cent of the center's 4,500 employees were poised to lock UCP out of the buildings.

No matter what happens tomorrow, King declared, Willowbrook workers will continue their legal challenge to the arrangement "because the private group is not qualified to take over the care of retarded people."

It was in May that the union's attorneys filed a skillfully worded lawsuit in the state court system. The suit downplayed the issue of jobs and civil service status, while bringing to the fore some sticky constitutional questions, namely: Under existing state law, is it constitutional for New York State to contract out governmental functions to private groups?

But even so, the underlying issue remains jobs. Under a federal court order of 1975, the state is required to reduce Willowbrook's population, now at 2,400,