



The sprawling Willowbrook Developmental Center: Are the residents becoming part of a system of paperwork and numbers games?
 S.I. Advance Photo by Frank J. Johns

It also established timetables, guidelines, committees and paperwork.

The most important of these committees — (as well as the primary source of the paperwork) is the Willowbrook Review Panel, composed of seven experts in the field of mental retardation.

The panel, forever keeping an eye on community placement goals, makes recommendations to the state and informs the court of progress and stalemates, but it is not empowered to run Willowbrook.

It's a puzzling, adversarial relationship that has developed between the panel and the state, with panel members questioning state management and state officials criticizing the notion of federal intervention into their affairs.

On the UCP issue, however, the review panel has remained strangely silent, refusing to affirm support of the private group. Saying the plan was agreed to by the state and the parents, panel members insist they can do nothing to assist or assure an easy transition to private operation.

In fact, some members express

doubts about the takeover, feeling UCP has not proved it is willing to work vigorously toward the panel's primary concern — the development of group homes and the eventual abolition of institutions like Willowbrook.

Public workers

They constitute an army at Willowbrook, 4,300 strong. They're concerned more and more about a smaller institution and what that will do to their numbers.

Many feel they've developed a certain degree of expertise in dealing with their residents and see the prospect of deinstitutionalization as a sticky, insurmountable problem.

Worker opposition to the UCP agreement was born in this realization — that the future holds more and more relinquishing of state mental health care to local governments and private groups.

And with a good 70 percent of the Willowbrook work force minority and 65 percent women, the state policy dictating smaller institutions will doubtless eventually leave many of them looking.

A fraction of state employees at Wil-

lowbrook is criticized, too, by parents and administrators who say these workers are over-concerned about pension and under-concerned about the retarded.

And as permanent civil servants, these few "rotten apples" come armed with tenure and an organized union, making it difficult, at best, for them to be fired.

Unanimously, the threatened strike by the union representing everyone from treatment staff to kitchen workers is being viewed with despair, because the takeover is a court-mandated, not management-ordered, prescription to Willowbrook's woes.

But the workers say it won't work because UCP doesn't have the years of experience they do. And besides, the workers are angry — because they never had a say in the decision, because the state never made clear to them their future and perhaps most importantly because the state has made no commitment to re-train them once Willowbrook is expunged.