

around the city. It was the largest number of persons ever arrested in a single event in the United States.

These actions and the overwhelming presence of helicopters, jeeps and armed troops became the major topics of conversation of the APA convention. With this virtual ringside seat on the battle, some members, in line with Dr. Garber's address, felt it their business to speak out on the possible psychological causes and effects of the situation.

Presenting their views were Dr. B. Perry Ottenberg, professor of psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania; Dr. Milton H. Miller, head of the psychiatric institute at the University of Wisconsin; Dr. Seymour L. Halleck of the department of student health services at the University of Wisconsin, and Dr. John P. Spiegel, director of the Lemberg Center for the Study of Violence at Brandeis University. They did not speak for the APA as a whole.

The psychiatrists were generally appalled at the inconsistent action on the part of the authorities. Last week police had allowed the Vietnam veterans to camp in a city park after the Supreme Court had ruled that such camping was illegal. This week camping was authorized and then unexpectedly and forcefully denied. This, said Dr. Spiegel, is the type of action found in the homes of delinquent children. The children of inconsistent parents are tempted to test the parents' authority to the limits. These are the kinds of action, says Dr. Miller, "that strengthens the cleavage between the generations."

**The psychiatrists recognized** the need of the authorities to enforce order but expressed fears over the effects of heavy-handed tactics. After viewing the action at several key trouble spots, they felt that indiscriminate arrests and the dubious use of tear gas could only be harmful to the already frustrated protesters. Dr. Halleck suggested that the Government should employ the services of people like himself in these situations. Observers should be on hand to ensure the civil and psychological rights of those involved and to help work out creative solutions to the problems.

At the Tuesday business meeting of the APA Dr. Isidore Ziferstein of the neuropsychiatric institute at the University of California School of Medicine in Los Angeles said that what happened "is anti-therapeutic in terms of the mental health of our youth." He suggested that "a mature, adult response on the part of Government officials should have been to acknowledge the legitimate aims of these young people . . . and to discuss with them those issues in which they have a life-and-death interest."

He proposed that the APA adopt a resolution stating that, "We, as psychi-

atrists, have a responsibility to point out to our Government officials the anti health effects of such a response." His resolution was defeated. □

#### HARD TIMES

### Drought, land and ecology

The economic, social and ecological problems of the semiarid Great Plains states are, in their own way, as serious as those of Appalachia, but not nearly so publicized. Americans remember the travails of John Steinbeck's Joads in California, but they tend to forget the drought and related economic problems of the Great Plains that drove these heroes of "Grapes of Wrath" away from their Oklahoma land.

Life on the Great Plains is still hard. And the lessons of the 1930's, although partly learned, did not sink in deeply enough totally to prevent recurrence. There was another drought in the 1950's. Then, in the summer of 1970 a new one started on the plains of Oklahoma, west Texas and eastern New Mexico. The drought continued this year, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture has now pretty much written off this year's dryland wheat crop in the affected area. Seeds did not germinate or, if they did, the parched seedlings could not survive. Although blowing dust from wind erosion does not yet equal the dustbowl of the 1930's, dust is piling up along roads and fencelines.

USDA officials are ranking the drought as the kind that occurs only once in 200 years—far worse than the one of the 1930's. But this time, they say, a considerable percentage of the farmers in the affected area will suffer only the economic loss of their crops during the period of the drought. This is primarily because these farmers used a variety of soil conservation techniques that will save their land. But there is another considerable percentage who did not; USDA says about 2.6 million acres of farmland have suffered long-term ecological damage due to the blowing away of fertile topsoil.

**The conservation practices** used are well-known by now. They include strip farming of land at right-angles to the prevailing wind; stubble-mulch tillage (leaving the previous crop's stubble to hold the earth in place after cultivation); planting crops such as winter rye to hold soil during this period; growing "shelter belts," lines of trees to serve as windbreaks, and putting marginal cropland into grazing.

Another technique, of course, is to abandon dryland farming and go to irrigation, and at least some of the irrigated farms in the drought-affected area are economically sound in the

middle of the drought. But, Lloyd Partain, assistant administrator of USDA's Soil Conservation Service, says in some cases irrigation reservoirs are going dry, too. And in the Texas Panhandle, where much of the irrigation water comes from groundwater sources, the water table is ever declining; in the worst cases water that once was available at 300 feet is now tapped only by drilling to 800 feet.

**The reasons** why conservation practices were not used on the land USDA says is damaged are complex: The temptation is great to "block farm" large acreages—to plant large blocks of land without strip-cropping. This practice is encouraged by the possibility of using huge tractors and other machinery to mass produce crops, and it is exacerbated by the increasing absentee ownership by corporations formed by well-to-do urbanites who like the special tax writeoffs they get from farm losses (although this problem was somewhat lessened by the latest tax reform law).

But a good part of the problem may be due simply to the hard-scrabble kind of life lived on the Great Plains. As much as a farmer might want to follow good conservation practices, sometimes he is forced by economic necessity to make as much money as he can from this year's crop without regard to the future. Dr. Carl Kraenzel, a rural sociologist at the University of Texas at El Paso, suggests that the increasing prices of urban-produced goods and machinery the farmer must buy to stay in business are squeezing him so hard that he has little choice.

Dr. Kraenzel has formulated a concept he calls "the social cost of space," which states that not only does the aridity of areas such as the Great Plains greatly lessen their productivity compared with more humid areas, but because of underpopulation it also greatly increases other costs. For instance, a large part of the farmer's costs are for shipping machinery from urban centers and for shipping his product back to them. The nation's answer so far has been to let marginal farmers fail and move to urban areas. The drawbacks of this approach are increasingly evident.

**The main damage** to drought-stricken lands is loss of fertility due to the blowing away of organic materials with topsoil. The lands become even less productive, and the likelihood of failure of farms becomes greater. Dr. Kraenzel suggests the answer may be more widespread use of irrigation, the water to come through giant diversion projects from as far away as northern Canada. But environmentalists are increasingly opposed to such projects and, sometimes, to irrigation itself. □