CONFERENCE REPORT:

INMATES VS. A.P.A.

From May 2-6 members of anti-psychiatry/"mental patients'" rights organizations from coast to coast (plus two visiting activists from the Netherlands) met in Berkeley, California for the 8th annual Conference on Human Rights and Psychiatric Oppression. As usual, the conference featured numerous workshops concerning aspects of psychiatric abuse and ways of working against it and creating real alternatives to the "mental health" system.

A unique feature of this year's conference was the fact that the annual convention of the American Psychiatric Association was taking place simultaneously in nearby San Francisco. Our conference had been purposely scheduled to coincide with this infestation of psychiatrists in order to give the psychiatric inmates' liberation movement an opportunity to confront the thousands of shrinks as they met to pat each other on the back and plan their dirty work for the coming year.

As it turned out, most of the scheduled workshops at our conference took a back seat to the ongoing preparations to confront the APA and its lackeys in the most effective way possible; many of us, in fact, experienced the entire conference as a marathon demonstration planning session. There were a range of ideas on how to best make our point at the rally scheduled for May 5 in front of San Francisco's Civic Auditorium, where the APA would be holding its annual business meeting. For the first time in the history of the national movement (to the best of my knowledge) there existed an overriding sentiment in favor of taking more radical and confrontative actions against the psychiatric empire than simple chanting, speechmaking, and sign-carrying. A sizable number of participants wanted to disrupt the APA meeting to the point of making it impossible for it to continue--i.e., invade the auditorium, seize the microphone, etc. Others, though in favor of taking bolder than usual steps at the demo, feared that such actions would result in arrests, police violence, and a repressive backlash against the anti-psychiatry movement.

On the day before the rally, a compromise was finally reached between partisans of the two schools of thought: At a given point during the demonstration, those who wished to do so would link arms and block the main entrance to the auditorium until arrested or until we were satisfied that our point had been made. A statement was drawn up for the press and public explaining our action and those who planned to participate were given a crash course in arrest and bail procedures.

The next day we began our demonstration with a vigorous and enthusiastic march to the Civic Auditorium from Glide Church, where we had just held a tribunal on psychiatric crimes. Wearing T-shirts proclaiming "Psychiatry Kills!," carrying balloons that read "Smash the Therapeutic State," and chanting "Shrinks have killed and shrinks have lied/Psychiatry is genocide!" and "Hey, hey, APA, How many people did you kill today?," we converged on the auditorium en masse, where we were joined by supporters from the San Francisco area's progressive community in the largest anti-psychiatry demonstration yet held in the U.S. Many people made powerful statements over the equally powerful P. A. system regarding the inhuman nature of psychiatric "treatments" and their personal experiences with psychiatry. Then, over the objections of APA security personnel and the San Francisco police, twenty-five of us linked arms and sat down in front of the auditorium's main entrance, right beneath the marquee which (at that point) read "Welcome American Psychiatric Association." The following statement was then read over the microphone and released to the press people covering the event:

> We are survivors of psychiatric assault. Today we stand linked in the common purpose of chaining off this immoral meeting of the American Psychiatric Association. We represent the chains by which the entire psychiatric system has bound and enslaved us and our society.
>
> We are taking this action today not only to express our outrage at the continuing psychiatric inquisition, but to symbolically blockade the annual business meeting of the American psychiatric profession. The APA conference is a destructive force. We believe this meeting has no right to take place, since its purpose is to perpetuate the existence of a parallel police force which engages in systematic policies of spiritual, emotional, and physical degradation and murder.
>
> We care about ourselves and our bodies, and believe that no remnants of the psychiatric system should survuve. Let this action serve notice to all those who would dismiss the seriousness, dedication, and growing strength of the anti-psychiatry movement that the days of psychiatry as an institution of social control are indeed numbered. We will not rest until our aims have been accomplished.

(cont. on page 4)