

THE LOOTING IN NEW YORK

Andy Young made another vapid remark when he commented on the widespread looting during New York's blackout last week. "When people are hungry," he said, "they will steal."

So they will, and who's to blame them? But the grocery stores weren't the main target during the New York blackout; the gadgetry stores were. Thousands of TV sets were looted, and they were not about to be sold for food. Nor were the assaults or the arson committed for food.

There was a serious breakdown of social order in New York last week. Civilization and its laws cannot depend on the existence of policemen or the P.G.&E. As a practical matter, civilized laws depend on people internalizing their meaning. That is more difficult for those who do not feel they have a stake in society - but there is much more to it than that, as witness the growth of white collar crime. The more fortunate don't need the lights off.

A Dallas rabbi, Levi A. Olan, comments in the current issue of Judaism that a major threat to Judaism - and he might have added, to civilization - is "the organization of life as if there were no God." We are dangerously kidding ourselves if we think that Andy Young's comment on New York is closer to the truth than Rabbi Olan's.

On that point, we might return to basics and take another look at the Soviet Union - not just as another industrial society with some decreasingly different economic theories, but as a government which, above all, has organized life as if there were no God. Instead, there are arbitrary

rules which cannot be internalized, but finally depend on brute police power.

That is why there are over a million political prisoners in the Soviet Union today. There is hard evidence of at least 500 prisons for political and religious dissenters, including Jews, Seventh Day Adventists, Baptists, and Methodists. In the Krasnodar district - which has 16 known prisons and camps, and where political dissenters are sent to isolated work in underground atomic plants - there is also a "psychiatric" camp for 2000 men and women. Chernovitsk has 5000 prisoners in one camp, mostly Jews and Baptists, doing hard labor in quarries. Leningrad, which some have suggested as a "sister city" for San Francisco, has a large number of prisons for political and religious prisoners, including four "psychiatric" prisons in the old Alexander Nevsky monastery and so on.

The arrest of Anatoly Sharansky on investigation of "treason," and the imprisonment of Josef Begun for "parasitism" are just current examples of Soviet social control by sheer intimidation. It is good, incidently, that a large number of state legislators, led by Assembly Speaker Leo McCarthy of San Francisco, just sent a note to Soviet Consul Zinchuk here, protesting the action against both those Jews. The final charge against Sharansky may be personally more serious - but the imprisonment of Begun also has serious, chilling consequences: All Jews applying for visas are subject to losing their jobs, and therefore to charges of "parasitism."

We have to be concerned with what is happening in the Soviet Union. But by the same token, we have to be concerned lest the American society itself become more and more like the Soviet's: "organized as if there were no God."

So we are returned to the basic mission of the Jews but perhaps we can no longer perform our basic function, having too long organized our own

Jewish life as though God didn't exist. Rabbi Olan has another poignant comment on that point: "Loyalty to the State of Israel and a sense of tragedy are profound experiences of the modern Jew, but they will not long sustain his will to endure."