

Sooner Scene

THE economic future of Oklahoma was the subject of serious study by one hundred of the state's leading businessmen at a three-day seminar at Western Hills in the first week of April.

"Oklahoma has horsepower, manpower and brainpower in abundance," President G. L. Cross said in opening the seminar. "The only serious question is whether we will use our brainpower to make the most of our horsepower and manpower."

"Economic centers of our country are shifting," Cross said. "It is our responsibility to see that these centers have an opportunity to locate with people who are making an aggressive effort to construct a really great civilization. We can make this opportunity possible only through our own efforts."

This was the first of three seminars on "public responsibility" sponsored by the University of Oklahoma, with assistance from the Fund for Adult Education and Resources for the Future, Inc. James E. Webb of Oklahoma City will serve as general chairman of the seminars and Dr. Cortez A. M. Ewing of the University of Oklahoma as faculty chairman. This series will make a real impact on the economic thought and planning in Oklahoma.

In speaking of public policy, Dr. Joseph L. Fisher, president of the Resources of the Future, Inc., said that people who live on the "islands of well-being" in the world should consider with compassion and thought the other nation, the other person. The per capita income in the United States is \$2,000 per person yet two-thirds of the people of the world have less than \$100 per year, and are "not too far from the edge of existence."

Dr. Fisher stated, "Part of the challenge of the future for us in this highly favored country will be through far-sighted and generous public policy to offer in a dignified way all appropriate encouragement and aid to those in less-developed regions in their massive but often fumbling effort to advance themselves in material welfare. We must help them find their own boot straps so they may pull."

Some factors which best indicate the shifting nature of our material economy can be found in a comparison of 1870 and 1954. Agricultural products as a per cent of material production dropped from 27 to 8, and timber products from 4 to less than 1. Minerals increased from 1.5 in 1870 to nearly 5 in 1920 and then fell to 3.3 in 1954.

"These statistics," Dr. Fisher pointed out, "do not mean that natural resources have been less important or necessary in any basic sense; they indicate that other elements of material production have grown faster, such as the provisions of processed goods of many sorts and services."

This shift is significant, particularly in the Southwest where in 1950 almost 70 per cent of the labor force was engaged in service industries—an increase from 23 per cent in 1900.

In looking toward the twenty-first century Dr. Fisher predicted that by the year 2000 the United States will have a population of 331 million as compared with 177 million in

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1959. Employment may double from about 65.7 million in 1959 to a medium estimate of 132 million in 2000. The work week will be reduced to approximately 35 hours.

Productivity has been increasing at around 3 per cent a year. This increase is expected to be 3.5 per cent for the next 40 years. In terms of gross national product, according to Dr. Fisher, a middle estimate of \$2,140 billion will be reached in the year 2000, nearly 4½ times the \$484 billion produced in 1959. In per capita terms, the increase will be from \$2,730 to \$6,470.

Trends in the economy of the Southwest were reported by Dr. Harvey S. Perloff, economist with the Resources of the Future.

He pointed out that between 1939 and 1954 the total income and the per capita income in Oklahoma increased more rapidly than the national average. Oklahoma had the third highest percentage increase per capita income in the country in these years. This improvement occurred in spite of the failure of population in Oklahoma to keep up with national increases.

Perloff mentioned seven significant trends that will affect regional development. There has been a shift of employment out of agriculture and mining and a very large increase in service employments, suggesting that "future employment opportunities lie largely in manufacturing and

service industries."

Perloff further believes, "Major opportunities are to be found in the growth of business and professional services which employ skilled persons at relatively high wages."

The development of the University of Oklahoma high-speed computer center, the research park and the center for continuing education will practically assure this type of economic growth.

American industry has been ever increasing its capacity to substitute one basic material resource for another, and this represents another trend as well as a strength of the economy.

Perloff also contends that fewer and fewer industries are making their moves because of low wage levels. Market considerations, especially high consumer income, provide the most important attraction for certain industries.

Industrial decentralization is another long-term trend that has influenced this region. The Southwest and the Far West have exceeded other areas in this respect.

There is an increasing reliance of industry on research and development. The University of Oklahoma is now sponsoring more than one thousand research projects. Basic research facilities, available to industry, are being developed at a rapid pace on the campus. Several companies have established excellent research programs within their own organizations.

Another factor which many think will become of more and more importance in the future is called "amenity resources," and includes climate, wooded areas, recreational areas, educational and cultural opportunities—things which together make an attractive living and working environment.

Finally, there is the trend toward urbanization, meaning that some community areas will grow as others fade away. On the local and state levels the human element will often be the determining factor. Resources, markets, manpower usually exist in abundance in a number of areas while only one area will be chosen for development. Here is where Oklahoma can make a good case for "amenity and human resources."

These were only a few of the points discussed by the hundred men who spent three days thinking seriously about public responsibility.

The pay-off will come when the maximum number of well-informed Oklahomans, as individuals, devote their time and energy—with a sense of public responsibility—to solving political and economic problems confronting the state.

—R. BOYD GUNNING

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