

Editorial

Pray for rain???

The destruction of the wheat, soybean, and corn crop in the U.S. grain belt, is likely to result in actual famine in some parts of the world, otherwise dependent on American grain imports for their margin of survival. Take, for instance, lands in Africa and the Near East which lie in the path of locust hordes.

Even in the United States itself, we may see an increase in the numbers of people who suffer from serious malnutrition, who depend now for their sustenance on the surplus foods given to soup kitchens. Such supplies are in danger of drying up.

There is also the case of the farmer unable to plant a crop under present drought conditions, who will not benefit from price rises, and may even go further in debt if the government demands that advance payments on the crop already distributed by the Department of Agriculture be repaid.

The situation is extremely dangerous, but there may be a bright side to the crisis, if it shocks people into action now—before it is too late. Perhaps we needed this drought, just as in Biblical times the floods were interpreted as a final warning by the Lord to a heedless hedonistic people.

Even without the drought, U.S. agriculture has been systematically devastated by policies which drove farmers off the land, and removed fields from cultivation. Cattle herds were being decimated. Worse still, not only was there no attempt to maintain stores at an adequate level, but their reduction to amounts below the level of safety was accounted a policy success.

A similar situation has existed in the infrastructure necessary to support agriculture. Railway lines were not maintained; irrigation projects were at a standstill; and the electricity grid was being operated far above the margin necessary to allow normal surges in demand, so that brownouts and blackouts were predicted for the summer months.

The drought has exacerbated all of these problems, but it has also underscored them in a particularly stark fashion. For example, what insanity could have prompted the proposal to disassemble the Shoreham

nuclear plant merely to propitiate a bunch of anti-nuclear fanatics? Yet, this is on the verge of occurring in New York State.

The so-called greenhouse effect is now eliciting new interest as a possible explanation for the unusually dry and hot weather. The immediate cause of the present drought is thought to be a diversion of the jet stream, which ordinarily brings cool air into southern Canada, but has now been pushed into more northerly regions.

The reasons behind this are not understood by meteorologists, but such things have occurred before, for example, in the United Kingdom, in 1976. Any long-term heating of the Earth due to increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere might possibly be exacerbating the drought, but can by no means be considered as causal.

We can look for a more likely cause for the shift in weather patterns, in the elimination of rain forests in the Amazon. These forests acted as energy pumps for global weather systems, yet they have been wantonly cut down, because of the enforced use of charcoal as an energy source by countries such as Brazil, which were ordered to cut back on the development of nuclear energy by the United States.

Whatever the causes of the drought, a certain course of action is obvious. We must have a crash program to immediately bring as many nuclear plants as possible on line. (One good way would be the mass production of modular units.) Then, the promise of fusion power must be promptly realized.

We obviously need large-scale water projects such as the North American Water and Power Alliance (Nawapa), which would pump water from Alaska, through Canada and into the western United States and down through Mexico.

What if a greenhouse effect is occurring? If this is the case, we can expect a shift of rainfall patterns to the poles and equators. This would present us with an engineering problem on the scale of that which we will have to face in order to colonize the planet Mars. Just the sort of problem which we should be solving!