

Fears of drought assuaged

Berkeley & Boston

A MODERATELY wet winter has eased fears of a second year of drought in much of the mid-west and Rocky mountain areas of the United States, and long-range forecasts have even raised hopes of a year of bumper crops. But some regions still face shortages, and despite recent rains, rationing is already being implemented.

Last season's mid-western drought was probably a one-time occurrence, possibly caused by temperature anomalies in the tropical east Pacific. While some areas of the mid-west remain drier than normal, another extensive grain-belt drought is unlikely this year.

Californians now face an unprecedented third consecutive year of drought, as weather patterns in the Pacific diverted the jet stream and its storms away from the state for much of the season. Rainfall for most of the winter was less than half of normal, leaving the state in a dangerously dry condition, according to William Helms of the state drought centre. A wet March has provided some relief in the central part of the state, and the cities of Southern California were spared the full effects of the drought, but much of the San Francisco Bay area is still in crisis and beginning to bargain for water from other parts of the state.

Many Californians assumed the drought could not persist for three years in a row, as it never has in the 120 years during which records have been kept. So the current crisis, with its accompanying water rationing, came as a rude shock. Santa Clara County, home to California's semiconductor industry, is one of the hardest hit areas in the state. Dependent on local water supplies, the county has been little helped by the March rains, which fell mostly to the north and in the mountains to the east.

Reservoirs that feed Santa Clara's underground aquifer were empty in February for the first time in history, sending county officials begging for water loans from other parts of the state, amid fears that land in Santa Clara would begin to sink if more water were drawn from underground.

March rains have eased the plight of California's \$15,000 million agriculture industry, which earlier this season was warned of likely cutbacks in water allotments of up to 60 per cent. The State Department of Water Resources says cutbacks are still likely, but will be smaller.

In the north-east, the unseasonably warm and dry winter has also prompted concern over the prospect of severe water shortages. Water levels in key reservoirs in New York, Massachusetts and several other states are at or near historic low points, after four consecutive years of

abnormally arid weather in the region.

Last week, New York's Drought Management Task Force voted unanimously to recommend that a water emergency be declared for New York City and 11 other counties in the state. The move followed a declaration of water emergency last month in Massachusetts, giving the state government jurisdiction to enforce mandatory restrictions on water usage by municipalities.

Although the situation is most severe in Massachusetts and southern New York, representatives from the United States Geological Survey (USGS) and other state environmental agencies say that all the northeastern states in the United States have been affected by particularly dry conditions over the past year and

SOVIET PSYCHIATRY

New independent association

London

NINETEEN Soviet psychiatrists, from Moscow, Leningrad and other major cities, have established the Independent Psychiatric Association (IPA) of the USSR. According to Dr Viktor Lanovoi, president of the new organization, the IPA does not intend to enter into conflict with the existing All-Union Society of Neuropathologists and Psychiatrists. Nevertheless, its founding statement makes it clear that it has come into being in response to the abuses that have compromised Soviet psychiatry in the eyes of the world.

Its founding statement declares that the IPA is open to "all those who consider it necessary . . . to defend the doctor against social and political pressure, and to defend people, healthy or ill, against extreme socio-political and psychiatric arbitrariness".

The IPA founding follows hard on the heels of a two-week visit to the Soviet Union by a team of US psychiatrists to investigate charges of psychiatric abuse. International criticism of Soviet psychiatric practices resulted in a decision in 1983 by the All-Union Society of Neuropathologists and Psychiatrists to resign from the World Psychiatric Association (WPA) to forestall its impending expulsion. The society has now filed an application for readmission, but the IPA has announced its intention to apply to the world body as well, and only one national society in each country can be a member of the WPA.

The US visiting delegation was allowed into the Soviet Union under conditions similar to those governing arms-control inspectors. It visited hospitals and patients of its choice. IPA member Aleksandr Podrabinek, who some 10 years ago

became the first person within the Soviet Union to attempt to monitor psychiatric abuse, worked closely with the delegation. Podrabinek maintains that recent, much publicized "improvements" in the Soviet treatment of penal psychiatric cases were largely cosmetic. Moreover, rather than releasing all political "patients", Podrabinek points out, the authorities have actually hospitalized some new ones.

Nevertheless, Podrabinek welcomed the US visit as an important breakthrough. Now back in the United States, the visiting team will issue an executive summary of its findings in one month. The American Psychiatric Association, one of the trip's organizers, has taken no position on the All-Union's Society's application for readmission to the WPA, and will not comment until the report is produced. But Podrabinek has issued his own account. He stressed the shock felt by many of the Americans at the lack of compassion with which the Soviet psychiatrists treated their political "patients".

Although the Soviet psychiatric establishment clearly needs to win over world opinion, and in particular that of the powerful US vote in the WPA, official opinions, according to Podrabinek, were divided as to whether the proposed US visit would do them more good than harm. Up to the last minute, he said, the Soviet side kept altering the terms of the visit — deciding, for example, that the Soviet psychiatrists and not the patients nor the Americans would select which relatives or friends would accompany the patients during the examinations. In the end, the patients simply brought the relatives of their choice, and the Soviet side made no attempt to challenge these choices.

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