

Eastern Europe

Widespread shortage of energy

THE Soviet Union and its European Comecon allies face considerable problems with energy supplies this winter. This is, in part, due to the loss of generating capacity following the Chernobyl disaster. The damaged reactor No. 4 is now permanently 'entombed' in concrete, reactor No. 3 is still out of service and, throughout the Soviet Union, RBMK reactors have had to be temporarily withdrawn from service to make them 'operator-proof', a process which, according to Dr Valerii Legasov, will not be completed until 1987.

But Soviet hydroelectric generating capacity is also down because of a water shortage in Central Asia. Furthermore, there are shortfalls in oil, gas and coal production, due to lack of maintenance and repair work.

Last month, it was reported at a meeting of the Supreme Soviet's Commission on the Fuel and Energy Complex that the "energy shortage" due to Chernobyl and the lack of hydroelectric power would be "met" by increased efforts from the thermal generating sector. Just what "met" means in this context is not entirely clear, as Yurii Semenov, deputy chairman of the Fuel and Energy Complex Bureau of USSR Council of Ministers, predicted that electricity supplies would be "particularly difficult" in Ukraine, Central Asia and the Transcaucasus.

There are already difficulties with heat supplies in Moscow and Tashkent. Comecon countries that import electricity from the Soviet Union have had their quotas cut. In the case of Hungary, which normally imports almost 30 per cent of its electricity from the Soviet Union, instead of the hoped for 10,500 million kWh this year, there will be a cut of 500 million kWh, of which 280 million will come in the winter months. To replace this, the Soviet Union has offered 168 million m³ of natural gas, but the Hungarians are not entirely happy about the substitution. At the Comecon summit in Bucharest last month, the Hungarian Prime Minister, Gyorgy Lazar, spoke critically about "occasional disorders in the unified system" of energy supply "in the recent period" — a remark widely interpreted as referring to shortfall in natural gas supplies either due to production difficulties in Siberia, or to supplies earmarked for the Soviet bloc being diverted to Western Europe to earn hard currency.

Restriction of supplies from the Soviet Union has led to some squabbling among the Comecon partners. In Bucharest, Lazar accused unspecified "partners" of the "unsystematic acquisition" of electricity, to the danger of Hungarian supplies. This statement was taken by the Hungarians as a reference to the Romanians,

who, the Hungarians say, in early 1985 almost blacked out the entire "integrated Comecon grid" (Eastern Europe plus the Soviet Union west of the Urals) by attempting to draw more electricity than their entitlement.

Romania has recently come under fire from several East European countries on energy issues. Last year, according to the Yugoslavs, the Romanians drew too much generating capacity from the joint Yugoslav-Romanian Iron Gates hydroelectric station. More recently, the Czechoslovak party daily *Rude Pravo* accused the Romanians of failing to supply



power station parts which, the paper said, will cause delays in refitting Czechoslovak power stations and cause electricity shortages well into 1987. Despite draconian restrictions on domestic use (only one bulb, maximum 40 W per room, and no heating of rooms or water in the morning or the evening) there are still regular lengthy power-cuts in Romania.

Other Comecon countries have also announced rationing. In Bulgaria, there is a limit on the number of kilowatt-hours allowed per household per month, and a new crime, "theft of electricity", has been defined. In Poland, a major coal-producer, there is said to be "chaos" at the coal shops, and the radio carries daily announcements as to which enterprises may expect energy supplies that day.

The preferred solution to the energy problems of the Comecon bloc is nuclear energy. Chernobyl has not changed this; the only difference is that there has been a major effort by the nuclear authorities in the member countries to assure the public that the VVER reactors they use are of different type from the RBMKs used at Chernobyl, and that, in any case, additional safety measures are being taken.

A new programme of nuclear energy cooperation in the Comecon countries has now been completed, and is awaiting ratification. This will include the construction of nuclear power stations and nuclear district heating stations for cities. Twelve such heating stations are now under construction in the Soviet Union. **Vera Rich**

US defence

Biological war still a threat

Washington

A PENTAGON report* released earlier this month on the threat of biological war from the Soviet Union reflects the growing interest in the subject in US military circles. The report reiterates claims that the Soviet Union is violating the terms of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention of 1972. It also provides the most comprehensive evidence so far released supporting the US contention that the release of anthrax in Sverdlovsk in 1979 was related to weapons research.

Without explaining how the evidence was gathered, the report says that as much as 10 kg of dry anthrax spores was released into the atmosphere in Sverdlovsk. The report says that the scope of the clean-up, the number of victims and the involvement of the military conflict with the Soviet explanation that contaminated meat was the source of the outbreak.

The report follows the regular five-year review of the 1972 Convention that took place in September in Geneva. Pentagon spokesman Major Randy Morger says the current report has been in preparation for some time, and had been intended to coincide with the Geneva meeting but was delayed at the printing stage.

According to Brad Roberts of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the renewed interest in biological weapons issues can be traced to a presidential commission on chemical warfare chaired by former under secretary of state Walter Stoessel. The commission said last year that the United States could not afford to ignore Soviet activities on biological weapons, and should embark on comprehensive defensive research on biological agents. This strategy, the Stoessel commission argued, would deter the use of biological arms.

Although the Pentagon report concludes that the Soviet Union is developing biological weapons, it admits that violations of the 1972 Convention are difficult to identify. Research done for medical, biological and public health reasons is "also relevant to developing disease agents for warfare purposes". But the Sverdlovsk incident, the report claims, indicates activities that cannot be justified as prophylactic, protective or for peaceful purposes as permitted by the convention.

The report offers no further data on the yellow rain controversy, explaining in a footnote that its purpose is to focus on agents of disease rather than toxin weapons.

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* *Soviet Biological Warfare Threat, Defense Intelligence Agency DST-1610F-057-86, 1986.*