ANALYTICALLY SPEAKING

The column of our corresponding editor

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THE ENERGY IDEA DROUGHT

At the present time in the USA - and particularly in East Tennessee - we are in the grip of a long hot dry spell. Along with this rain drought we are also suffering from several other droughts: a drought of safe ways to produce energy and a drought of good ideas for new energy sources. There may be a connection between all of these droughts, but the last probably poses more serious long range consequences than the first. Our energy and idea droughts are interrelated because it seems there is nothing in our past, present or future that can satisfy environmental requirements and still work.

Nuclear power has been dealt so many blows that another one or two is hardly even news anymore. Thus, one would have had to search the inside pages of the newspapers to

find the story of the $5.3 billion Shoreham reactor, which has been completed on Long Island, but has never operated. The Long Island Lighting Company has agreed to "sell" the plant to the state of New York for $1 with the understanding that the state will dismantle it. Long Island Lighting will pay $400 or so million for the decommissioning. A similar fate may await the Seabrook plant in New Hampshire. More than a dozen other nuclear plants are in trouble with voters including the Sacramento, California Rancho Seco and the Boston Edison Pilgrim plant, both of which are to be subjects of referenda as to whether they should be closed. TVA shut down its five operating reactors in 1985, and only Sequoyah has been allowed to reopen /but it has had several emergency shutdowns, at least one of which was caused by too hot cooling water from drought reduced TVA lakes!/. So where is our electricity to come from in the future?

Hydroelectric power from dams always has seemed to get a good press—clean power is what many people call it. But now evidence is accumulating that dams create many new problems. An article in INSIGHT magazine of May 2, 1988 discusses silting and other complications resulting from dams. The Aswan High Dam in Egypt is cited as a dam that is in big trouble. Drought, overuse of the Nile for irrigation and build-up of silt have caused the water level to become so low that the turbines may have to cease producing electricity entirely. Intrusion of salt water and loss of silt formerly carried down the Nile complete the sad picture. Ecologists who once favored dams now rail against them. The World Bank is reassessing its support for future dam projects. Many more dams are planned for developing countries, but whether they will find the funds to build them is uncertain. Diseases such as malaria, once thought to be well on the way to eradication, are