

New Brooms in the USA *An American correspondent writes:*

At the time of his nomination as the new US Secretary of Interior, James G. Watt was head of the Mountain States Legal Foundation, a law firm dedicated to suing the very department he now controls; most of the cases involved timber or mining interests with designs on Federal property, including wilderness areas, reserves and national parks. At the Senate confirmation hearings, Watt insisted that there would be no conflict of interest, that he would judge all issues on their merits and that he is not against environmentalists, only 'extremists', defined as 'those who would deny economic development on public lands'.

But judging by his and the President's behaviour so far, the attack on conservation is even broader than wilderness exploitation. In the administration's first few weeks there were large-scale sackings of respected conservationists inside the Department, virtual abolition of the Council for Environmental Quality, disruption of the International Law of the Sea treaty just as it was reaching its painstaking conclusion, abrogation of agreements with Canada on acid rain, watershed and fisheries, and, among several other things, a CITES delegation in India that acted like representatives of the pet trade.

Reagan and Watt are now in a position to destroy America's rather good conservation record, not only in its 1970s revived form, but as a tradition that began in 1872 with the declaration of Yellowstone as the world's first national park. Does Reagan believe that he has an anti-conservation mandate? During the campaign he accused trees of causing more pollution than man, said that oil slicks in the Santa Barbara Channel near his home were beneficial to health, and opposed preservation of Alaska's wilderness on the grounds that few people would ever get to see it. But candidates say a lot during a campaign, and the environment was far from a central issue. Recent polls indicate that the surge of interest in conservation which began around 1970 is still going strong. One of these, published in 1980 by the (doomed) CEQ, found 73 per cent agreeing that 'an endangered species must be protected even at the expense of commercial activity'.

Already conservation and environment groups have been galvanised by the attack, membership is booming and campaigns are becoming better financed and more inventive. One excellent development is the election of former senator Gaylord Nelson to the presidency of the Wilderness Society; in his 18 years in Congress he was known as 'Mr Conservation', authored many conservation laws, was the founder of Earth Day, and gained a reputation as a fierce fighter for the cause. The hope now is that he, Russell Peterson and other political/environmental leaders will somehow get the message across to the President that he has chosen the wrong whipping boy for his economic philosophy.

Tsetse and the Chemical Companies

The March issue of *Vole* featured several articles on the tsetse problem in Africa, including an account by Marcus Linear of his investigation of the part played by the international chemical companies. For them, he says, FAO's \$2000 million programme was salvation when the West banned organochlorines and other poisons. 'The West' he goes on, 'is using FAO as a conduit to support its chemical industries and get rid of environmentally damaging and banned insecticides, such as DDT.'