

## NEW WORLD

## Salvation round the Corner

from a Correspondent

WHAT is effectively the United States Government's policy statement on the environment is due out soon, some weeks late. Its appearance is nonetheless fast work, for the members of the President's Advisory Council on Environmental Quality were appointed only in February. The report promises to be for the United States what the British white paper, *The Protection of the Environment*, should have been for Britain. In fact the latter, the first task of the Central Scientific Unit at the (then) coordinating Ministry of Housing and Regional Government, was hurried on to be out before the General Election. The result was a considerably slimmer and less detailed publication than had been intended. The American Council has taken the opposite line and been prepared to let the announced publication date slip in the interests of producing what had been promised.

The document is the President's first annual report on the state of the environment. It covers the national status of terrestrial, aquatic, marine, estuarine, urban, suburban, industrial, rural and "all other environments". All federal programmes have been reviewed from the point of view of their environmental impact and this has meant assessing projects already under way as well as scrutinizing new programmes. Thirty-six agencies are affected. In addition there is considerable discussion of the interrelation between population size, population distribution and land use, which should provoke a shift in outlook of the most fundamental and useful kind. The report also sets out priorities for action and sketches outlines for future projects.

One of the co-authors of the report and the only scientist on the three-man council, Dr Gordon MacDonald, has been on a fortnight's business tour of Europe "seeing how the other side lives" and how each can support the other. Almost a week of the visit has been spent in England—indicative, it seems, of the high regard Dr MacDonald holds of the British land use management methods. "There's no question about it—Europe is more advanced than the US [in this regard] and Britain is more advanced than most of Europe." Dr MacDonald was in no doubt that the most critical environmental problem facing US authorities concerns land use and the proper distribution of population and amenity. In particular, Britain has been highly successful in protecting the countryside. In the US, in contrast, "suburbia sometimes stretches as far as from Boston to Washington". To improve matters planning on a national scale had to come.

"Some people find it strange that a Republican administration has established 'national growth goals' and a Commission on National Population." But there was beginning to be general recognition that more planning was essential to achieve a better

quality of life for the generality. Federal government "interference" in local affairs and business was being welcomed by industry, Dr MacDonald maintains. The alternative, for the motor industry for instance, would be each car tailored to the laws of a different state. Air and water must be considered "public good" and transcend state law.

Where Europe could be congratulated on its land use practices *vis-à-vis* the US, the relative lack of concern here over car exhausts and the level of SO<sub>2</sub> in flue gases was worrying. (In the distribution of tasks on civil improvement among NATO members initiated by President Johnson, the US has in fact been allocated the car exhaust and safety problem and smoke purification because of the amount of work done there.) Part of Dr MacDonald's current mission has been to assess the contributions of different international organizations, involving Europe, in the environmental field. At present too many were in on the act, and this put too great a pressure on limited time and talent "in just attending all the meetings". The situation would be worse for the smaller countries. NATO for instance did not seem an appropriate body; apart from other considerations it was only a small group. OECD, on the other hand, was "uniquely suited" to the task. Dr MacDonald seemed unaware of the Council of Europe's activities (see *Nature*, 225, 888; 1970). One may guess that OECD will go forward as environmental "favourite son" and receive the bulk of American support. U Thant's recent proposal for an international body on UN lines to oversee the environment did not on the face of it seem a workable idea.

In this context it is significant that the US National Academy of Sciences has just set up a new committee (International Environmental Programs Committee) to help in the participation of the US scientific community in international environmental activities. It is headed by an experienced scientific diplomat, Dr Thomas F. Malone, and falls under the joint auspices of the NAS Environmental Studies Board and the Office of the Foreign Secretary. Previously Dr MacDonald was chairman of the Academy's Environmental Studies Board, a post that has since been taken up by Dr David M. Gates of the Missouri Botanical Garden.

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## Traineeships Abandoned

BUDGET cuts have forced the National Institutes of Health to reduce their support for predoctoral workers. Although present applications for predoctoral fellowships will be considered, this form of support will be phased out in 1971. Predoctoral fellowships, however,