

# U.S. Treasury Department: Save wildlife, starve people

by Marjorie Mazel Hecht

In a shocking affirmation of malthusianism, the U.S. Treasury Department Aug. 18 abstained from voting on a loan proposal to the southern African nation of Botswana to build a cattle slaughterhouse, because of its alleged potential harm to the Botswanan wildlife. The African Development Bank, of which the United States is a member, approved the \$7 million loan anyway, despite claims by the Treasury Department that the Botswanan livestock policies give preference to beef cattle and take land away from the country's bountiful wildlife.

A Treasury spokesman said that the abstention on environmental grounds—a first—was based on the provision of the 1987 Foreign Assistance Appropriation Act that mandates the Treasury Department to take into consideration “the environmental impact” of any development project being considered for funding by one of the multilateral development banks. There are now 36 projects on a “watch list,” monitored by the U.S. Agency for International Development, including major dams and other development proposals such as Brazil's giant Gran Carajas iron-mining project.

Whatever the rhetoric about “saving” the land and preserving nature, the Treasury Department spells genocide for a continent whose people are already dying. The Treasury Department, the world's banks, and most definitely the environmentalists, if they really wanted to “save” anything in Africa, would back a massive program of infrastructure and industry that would green the deserts and make Africa a food producer for the world. Instead, the sovereignty of the nation whose development is at stake must defer to the whims and fancies—and the brutal population control policies—of U.S. and European environmentalists. In Africa, U.S. foreign aid policy is now being determined by those who prefer to hunt wild game in a pristine environment than to fund the modern agriculture systems that could save the population of a continent from starvation and disease.

The decision to abstain on the Botswana vote, in fact, was personally ordered by Treasury Secretary James Baker, an amateur wild-game hunter and cattleman. In an arrogance

typical of the oligarchs in Prince Phillip's World Wildlife Fund, the Treasury Department instructed its representative at the African Development Bank in the Ivory Coast to state clearly at the bank meeting that “the only reason I am not voting ‘no’ on this project” is the willingness of Botswana to “engage conservation organizations constructively on this crucial issue of placement of fences to avoid adverse effects on wildlife.” (The government has erected several hundred miles of fencing to prevent the spread of hoof-and-mouth disease from the wildlife to the cattle.)

The department's instructions to its representative continue, “Unfortunately, the sectoral policies we see in place at the present time appear to favor a commercialized form of cattle management which includes as a side consequence the absorption of increasing grazing land by the commercial sector and denial of land resources to wildlife populations.”

## Malthusian experts only

The Treasury Department admitted that since it had no environmental scientists on its staff to advise them of “environmental impact,” it relied on the environmentalist lobby and the World Bank to supply the experts. In the Botswana case there were no less than nine environmentalist groups involved in coming up with an evaluation, including the United Kingdom's World Wildlife Fund, the U.S. Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), and the Kalahari Conservation Society.

When asked whether any “pro-growth” or “pro-development” group was consulted, the Treasury Department spokesman seemed startled. He then volunteered that he had been apprehensive four years ago about what the environmentalists were up to, but he now saw that they were actually concerned about “development.” What form this concern takes can be seen from the comments in a press release supporting the Treasury Department's action by the Natural Resources Defense Council's senior project attorney, David A. Wirth:

“Actions like the U.S. vote are necessary to assure that

development aid projects are not ticking time bombs, threatening to shatter the resource base in Africa. More than 85% of the rangelands in Africa have already been, or [are] at risk of being, turned to desert. Overgrazing is the biggest environmental problem in Botswana, where there are nearly three head of cattle per person—one of the highest ratios of livestock to human beings on Earth.

"This project still has absolutely no conditions designed to reform the environmentally devastating cattle situation in Botswana," said Wirth. "The African Bank has not included even minimal safeguards to assure that the project does not backfire and produce runaway increases in cattle numbers."

As for development, Wirth said in an interview, "We're concerned about sustainable development; sensible development, not willy-nilly."

The world "sustainable" is key here. It refers to the hideous concept developed by the United Nations of "carrying capacity"—how many people a piece of unimproved land can support. For the malthusians, Africa is "overpopulated" because the land can't support them—that is, unless agriculture is modernized and infrastructure upgraded, at which point so-called carrying capacity can improve dramatically. In other words, the problem is not the land or depleted resources but the refusal to invest—or let the sovereign nations involved invest—in improving the productivity of the land through irrigation, fertilization, and modern machinery. Had this Treasury Department philosophy prevailed in California, there would be no San Joaquin Valley; the most productive agriculture area in the world would be a desolate desert haven for insects, beasts, and of course, environmentalists.

In this context, it is most appropriate to note that the NRDC made its name in the early 1970s by lying about DDT and getting the United States to ban its production, based not on scientific evidence but on "public perception." At the time, DDT was responsible for saving millions of lives throughout the world. Its loss as a pesticide, along with subsequent anti-pesticide activities by the U.S. environmentalist lobby, is responsible, directly and indirectly, for the deaths of 100 million people worldwide, according to a conservative estimate by entomologist J. Gordon Edwards.

### **Life vs. wildlife**

To most people, an increase in beef cattle in a continent with pitifully small protein consumption and massive malnutrition sounds like a good idea. In Botswana, cattle are the main livelihood for a great number of the population, and cattle are second only to diamonds in the export market.

According to the World Bank's Southern Africa Programs Division, Botswana probably has proportionately more land reserved for wildlife than any other country, with even more land scheduled to be earmarked.

In fact, the government adopted a wildlife conservation policy in July 1986 that lays out in great detail how it intends

to preserve its "important national resource." As the report notes: "Botswana, unlike most countries in the world, still possesses many species of wildlife in considerable numbers . . . largely because of the earlier decisions of Government to recognize wildlife as an important national resource that must be conserved. As a consequence, National Parks and Game Reserves covering about 17% of Botswana's total land area were established at independence."

The government policy paper outlines an ambitious plan to develop the wildlife industry, with activities that range from supplying watering points and protection to wildlife, establishing rules for wildlife ranching and exports, to research into the transmissibility of hoof-and-mouth disease from wildlife to cattle. One objective of the plan is to reduce the number of rural dwellers who rely on subsistence hunting of wildlife, by providing new jobs.

### **The cattle industry**

As a former colony, Botswana has preferential access to the European markets, with a quota of 19,000 tons of export beef to the European Community, as well as the market available in neighboring South Africa. The Natural Resources Defense Council bemoans this fact, crying that Europe has a glut of beef and now exports it at "a third of the price paid for imports from Botswana." "All the incentives are there to increase cattle production," complained the NRDC's Wirth, who was particularly angry that the government was subsidizing the cattle industry, which he said was benefiting only an elite in the country. "The public at large are financing handouts," he said.

When asked whether the new slaughterhouse could not in fact help kill off the herds faster, thus alleviating the grazing problem, Wirth said, "Yes, it could have that effect . . . but the worst possible case—encouraging explosive growth—is not that unlikely."

Is overgrazing a problem? It does not have to be, with proper infrastructural inputs, especially water. It is only a problem when one has already written off a continent's population. Ironically, even the World Bank, not noted for its humanitarian policies, commented that all the NRDC's complaints about Botswana ignore the fact that the country has had a devastating drought for the past five years, which "has done incalculably more damage to the environment than any combination of policies or practices."

According to the NRDC's Wirth, the Treasury Department's stand on Botswana and its \$25 million slaughterhouse project is not simply about Botswana, but represents a "high-level" decision to "reform the economic policies of the multilateral banks." If this is the kind of reform the U.S. Treasury Department wants, Americans beware: The beef you are eating just might come from cattle grazing on land that the Treasury Department wants to reserve for an endangered species.