EDITORIAL COMMENT

Growing Up

Both of the previous two issues have contained critical comment from members of long and high standing, on the impact of recent legislative changes and public attitudes on forestry and, more particularly, on the Forest Service.

Their concern and dismay are understandable and to a degree, justified. The world in which they worked has been turned upside down, with no recognition given to past battles fought, or the distance that we have come since the founding of the Forest Service in 1920.

These people and their generation worked usually without public or political support. The land was wanted for farming or cheap wood, and there was (and are still) few votes in forests. They had to achieve their purpose by enthusiasm, rational argument, pragmatism, and strength of character.

That they succeeded is now a matter of record. New Zealand still has 27% of its area under forest (4% plantations and 23% natural forest) and it is not only self-sufficient in forest products, but has a growing export surplus.

Few other countries have achieved as much, and most of the credit must go to those who worked in forestry during the first fifty years of the life of the Forest Service.

Since then the flies of the winds of fashion have danced across the icing on that cake (and it has been thrown out) but little has been added to the original achievement which is their memorial.

On their foundation we build.

But while giving thanks for the strength of that foundation, members of the Institute of Foresters will have noted that the changes that have beset forestry are not the only changes around. The Forest Service is not the only department to be disestablished, nor is it the only one to have its production responsibilities "commercialised". Indeed "commercialisation" is now the rule for most departments and members should prepare themselves for "privatisation" also in due course.

For virtually the whole of this century so far, affairs in New Zealand have been governed and its people imprinted by great and dreadful events — the two world wars and the intervening depression. These events have inevitably conjured up the response that in unity there is strength, and a sense of national purposes to get
things right. But since 1945 there have been no more such overpowering events and for the first time perhaps in the human history of New Zealand a generation has grown up and come to power without such pressures.

The threads of purpose (except perhaps to make New Zealand a better place — whatever that means to different schools of thought) are no longer clear and a hundred flowers bloom on every conceivable issue. Regardless of politics, June 1984 marked a change in New Zealand affairs that will not be reversed. Its impact on those brought up in more predictable times must be hard. But from these changes come two real advantages for the Institute of Forests. One part of forestry’s strength in New Zealand has been its *esprit de corps*. Everybody knew everyone else and there was a very strong sense of purpose. That was good for its time, when we had to work against the prevailing view that the only good tree was a dead one, but with a swing in attitudes and the growing size of the forest industry, the days of a club are over. It is a national matter now.

Then, too, the Institute has always been very concerned by its visible overlap with the Forest Service. Given the size of the pond and the dominance of the Forest Service within it, that was inevitable, but it appeared an incestuous relationship whose ending should not be regretted.

So the Institute of Foresters is now free to work as it sees best for forestry in New Zealand. It will not be such a cosy world but it will be a more challenging one, and it will be one where forestry has come of age. The changes have been based on vote-pulling and economic theory, not on the worth of trees. That subject is still little understood, and there is plenty for the Institute to do.

*Reorganisation*

At the time of writing (late January 1986) the only pointer on future forestry administration is a statement to the Government on the role of the proposed forestry corporation, and by implication (because it is not in the corporation) a hint on possible locations for forestry sector services.

Opinions are divided on where the sector services (which include the Forest Research Institute) should go. Forest Service preference is said to be for a continuing mini-Forest Service while other sources look to incorporation into the Ministry of Agriculture (MAF) with the research side possibly going into the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research.
Of these two main options, the first, for standing alone, is surely the worst. Originally forestry stood alone simply because there was no one else on that side of the fence, but that position has become less and less sensible as the weight of production forestry in the economy and public interest in forests generally has grown. The second, incorporation into MAF, achieves most objectives so long as the Forest Research Institute goes too. The forestry sector is kept together and is in a land-use department with a very strong advisory service, a tradition of practical field research, and a need for new arrows in its quiver as some of the old ones get a bit blunt.

Standing alone, forestry has been too prominent a target for politicians seeking a rural vote, for exponents of arboreal apartheid and for anyone seeking a convenient scapegoat. Being seen as a matter largely for state servants and businessmen, it has lacked political influence and has been included in ministerial portfolios where it has nearly always been a minority interest. If New Zealand is to use its forest climate and soils to get back on to a forest economy, much stronger voices and wider support are needed.

The new corporation is to be a straightforward commercial undertaking with the power to place its effort wherever the profit lies. It may plant forests, process the wood, and retail the products. This sound very fine in theory but it is in fact an upset of traditional practice for no very clear purpose except for a scramble on to the bandwagon of "market forces".

In the past the Forest Service has concentrated its production activity into growing wood for sale. Its processing enterprises have always been justified, in the beginning at least, as demonstration units. The bulk of State wood has been sold for processing by other interests. No explanation has been given for the change in approach and it can only be assumed that vertical integration is assumed to be more efficient and tidy. In fact, all that is ultimately achieved is to give a very small number of processes, and probably also businesses, monopoly control of the resource. From that point of view it is indeed tidy.

Forest management and wood processing are two quite different exercises, connected only by the mutual interest in trees. Put in the same bed together, processing invariably steals the bed clothes, giving only what a particular industry feels inclined to pay. Market forces in fact cease to work because the resource now must be paid for at a level which justifies past investments in processing, and not at what it might fetch on the open market. The
Timber Industry Federation is nervous that its members' interests are in jeopardy from the constitution of the new forestry corporation. Its suspicion is justified.

The Institute of Foresters too must be suspicious. New Zealand's reputation in the field of forest plantation management is high largely because of the work done by the Forest Service and the Forest Research Institute. Would this work have been done by a forestry corporation? On the record of the large forest companies, it would not have been done. That is the nature of the beast, not disparagement.

How will this work continue?

The Wind of Change Still Blows

In 1984, the Forest Service called for opinions on a draft policy for the future management of tahr in the Southern Alps. There was wide response. All parties are agreed that too many tahr (as there once were in New Zealand) are a bad thing. Both population density and spread must be controlled. But there, agreement ends. The hunting fraternity seek a controlled sufficiency of animals to provide either sport for New Zealanders or a source of income from overseas tourists. The conservation interest, somewhat scornful of killing for pleasure and remembering past damage to vegetation from the initial population explosion, requires extermination.

This highlights the dilemma forced upon us by the careless but often deliberate confusion of the concepts of preservation and conservation. Conservation implies a respect for life, and its cause must be distorted in some degree by killing, whether for pleasure or for duty. Preservation implies the deliberate retention of some part of the biota, which may require human interference for its survival. It is a strongly management-oriented philosophy, and one that in New Zealand usually involves killing something. This contradiction between respect for life and its manipulation is not one intended in the international concept of national parks, and it may well be peculiar to New Zealand.

There is growing discussion outside this country on the question of “animal rights”. It may be time for us to start thinking about these matters here, as this is likely to be the next “issue”.

Training

The letter from 34 students at the School of Forestry may have been overtaken by events, but it does illustrate the ambiguous atti-
Editorial Comment

Attitude taken by many New Zealanders both to training and to forestry.

Any profession such as ours is made up of people whose background reflects the time of their recruitment. As forestry has become more technical and more sophisticated, so the requirement for more intensive training has grown. The ranger of 20 years ago has a son who is a forester, maybe to do the same job, because here as elsewhere, as well as a need for additional skills, there has also been an inflation of titles.

One product of the reorganisation now under way will be a much wider spectrum of employment for forestry graduates and people with a strong forestry component to their degree.

The amalgamation of occupational groups now under way in the Forest Service was a good idea not taken far enough because it did not address future needs, only present relativity. But whatever its defects or disadvantages, it is now of little relevance because there will shortly be no Forest Service, and whatever phoenix arises from the ashes will employ vastly fewer people.

In future, as always, most of the advantage will lie with those with higher qualifications. They will be the people who will secure most of the key jobs and who will have the most freedom to direct their own career. They will also earn more. Some will argue that qualifications do not make the person. They don’t — but they help. At the moment training in forestry in New Zealand still reflects the dominance of the old Forest Service, and that pattern may not best serve the future.

Graduate training lies entirely within one (necessarily) very small forestry school. Diploma training is industry-based at the Forestry Training Centre in Rotorua, and so structured that it is very difficult for people to take its courses unless sponsored by someone.

The Forest Industry Training Board is beginning to come to grips with registration of the skills of people working in forestry, but there is still no national apprenticeship scheme for young people starting out at the ground level.

Forestry has now come of age and out of the closet. The reorganisation may have been planned to kill the thistle, but it has in fact simply rotavated the roots and spread us through the community, into which we now have to integrate much better. It is time, therefore, for us to be less possessive about our institutions. Should not diploma and graduate training be put in the same school, and should not that school itself now be made part of some institution with still wider interests in land use training? The School of Natural
Resources at Lincoln comes to mind. If forestry is to be fully accepted in rural communities it must offer employment and mana to rural children. Then it will be seen as a permanent thing and not relief work. An apprenticeship scheme is needed.

MEMBERS' COMMENT

THE STIMULUS OF DIVERSIFICATION

Intensification of land use is conventionally presumed to work against forestry and the planting of trees, but there are situations where this does not happen. In the Bay of Plenty the boom in horticultural development has seen many (mainly dairy) farms subdivided into orchards. The horticultural industry is highly syndicated and very capital intensive, and often uses only the land suitable for its main purpose, leaving unsuitable land idle. This unsuitable land, mostly in gullies, quickly reverts to weeds, which in the original farm had been controlled by grazing.

Recognising the problem, the Tauranga County Council has put conditions in its district scheme that make it obligatory to establish woodlots on these potential weed problem areas at the time of subdivision. Forestry has been accepted as a justified land use in all rural zones in the county. This is in marked contrast to the surrounding counties where horticulture is less of an interest and pastoral farming is the main activity. Here the usual story of forestry being a conditional use still applies.

The Tauranga experience suggests that acceptance of woodlots in rural planning may not occur until the stranglehold of conventional land use has been broken. Change begets acceptance of change.

(With thanks to J. Roper, C. Schell, P. Tempest and R. Galbreath)