Are they expressions of universal truth, or are they simply eaten too many beans? Are they, to us in our search for truth, just irrelevant?

I think they are largely irrelevant: the problem with all this global village stuff is that it starts with the unadmitted assumption that someone else carries the can as aware and caring richer societies reform their ways. Inevitably the bearers of that burden live in the third world. The problem is that the global village is upstairs/downstairs and its proponents live upstairs.

H.G. Wells describes it in "The Time Machine" when his time traveller lands in a future society where the beautiful people lead elegant lives in the sun only to be dragged out at night by the depraved and ape-like people who toll for them underground. They end up in the pot. Is that sustainability? I suppose it is, of a kind, but is it Dr Thies' vision?

We have come a long way very fast. We have in fact done a great deal better than most in the field of forestry – disagree? Well, who has done better?

Are we not confident enough to seek out those countries, learn what we can from them and then formulate our own path towards sustainable forest management?

Away with colonial cringe!

John Purey-Cust

The Editor humbly requests that any executions be performed with a minimum of pain and mess – Ed.

'Trees are good, Trees work'

Laurie McDowall*

The establishment of exotic forest in New Zealand has been a brilliant technical success. In other respects it has been a major failure. This conclusion is based partly on hindsight but also reflects some long-held misgivings about our approach to forestry in New Zealand.

Long ago the late Sir Reginald Smythe said that his company (NZFP) should stick to trees. In fact he was saying: "Stay with the core business and do it better.” My company and others in the sector did not follow this advice. In answer to a question, Reg Smythe also said that “planting trees is an act of faith”. Again he was saying something that he, and others, instinctively knew to be correct but which could not be supported by a logical analysis of the investment economics involved. Reg Smythe’s "act of faith" comment was made long before we knew anything about the depletion of tropical forests, before acid rain in the northern hemisphere, before the advent of ozone layer holes and the theory of the greenhouse effect. These subsequent events tend to justify his intuitive conviction about planting trees.

If you saw the movie "Wall Street" you may recall the remarks of Gordon Gecko as he addressed the stockholders of a pulp and paper company in a takeover situation. He said "greed is good, greed works". That may be so, but I found myself, when thinking about forests, paraphrasing Mr Gecko and saying "trees are good, trees work". Few people would disagree. But if you want a forest you must plant it. Nature gave the world forests for nothing but that was a "one off" deal and won’t be repeated. All sorts of things have made it possible for us to plant exotic forests; technically our forests are a great achievement and we are very fortunate to have them.

Where we have failed is in our conception of forests as part of our economy; what the real need for them would be, and in our conception of their appropriate size.

When Britain joined the EC we were given a clear signal that our economy was going to change in a fundamental way. Loss of the lucrative British markets reduced our overseas income and made it impossible to protect our inefficient secondary industry any longer. This in turn destroyed the so-called full employment situation. In the 20 years since that time we have done little about our situation. Farm exports still provide our hard currency. We survive by being price takers for commodities in over supply and by successive devaluations which mostly increase overseas debt, increase on-shore costs and over capitalises the investment in farming land, thus perpetuating the cycle.

We have not developed a response to these problems. We are 20 years down the track and we don’t have an effective forest policy that could turn things around.

We have no real concept of the optimum size of our forests and how they might be used to change our basic econ-

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forestry management is poised at a point of divergence, with two distinct options, and one well worn (the status quo), the other overgrown from lack of use. Unlike the traveller in Frost’s poem, foresters know where both roads lead, and to most observers, the choice should be quite easy. If we travel down the “old and well-worn trail”, the first part of the journey will be much the same as our prevailing conditions. However, conditions will change; soon, and drastically, and the journey risks becoming a highly regulated undertaking, as is occurring in the Pacific Northwest. We might be told where to travel, when to travel, and how we may proceed. In many cases, it is quite probable that travel may even be stopped. There are residents along that way who do not like forest managers (as a group) and our journey will meet with an uncomfortable or even hostile reception.

Hopefully, the industry will proceed like the traveller in Frost’s poem and take “the one less travelled by” of voluntary compliance. Down this less-used way will be new experiences and different ways of travel. We may find the route difficult and cumbersome at first, and we undoubtedly shall have to be adaptable and make changes: such is normally the case with new and different modes of activity. However, this “means” is both more flexible and more pleasant.

For forest managers in the Southeast, our choice is to either adopt and implement Best Management Practices or not. Incorporating these guidelines into our management strategies should result in better maintenance of site productivity, less negative impact on water quality, reduced social opposition to managing...