dependence on trees, whilst in Britain the abstraction from responsibility given by easy access to the world’s timber markets has made that country, without repentance, one of the largest consumers of imported wood in the world, on a per capita basis exceeding the Japanese.

The confusion of course is subconscious. I doubt if Forest and Bird’s editor noticed the incongruity of the two articles mentioned earlier – probably a pakeha, the pakeha view of things was simply seen to be right, while the maori was there to be put right. Not so much racism as a missionary wanting to get out.

One of John Buchan’s heroes, a Scottish laird in (I think) “Greenmantle”, shakes his head over the devious forested hills of central Europe, in which by intimidation hide devious people, and compares them unfavourably with the honest naked hills of home.

Simon Jenkins, correspondent of The Times of London and a resident of a naked Wales, compared his attitude to foxhunting with his opinions on afforestation and child abuse (The Times, Oct. 23, 1993). He approves of none of them.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (the UK equivalent to Forest and Bird, but politically much more powerful), in its discussion paper “Forests for the Future” (1991) dismisses any claim that domestic afforestation will protect other peoples’ forests, on the grounds that only a small part of UK imports comes from the tropics. The majority is from temperate forest, much of it unmanaged, but apparently of no environmental value.

So the old cultural devil keeps cropping up, and the problem for foresters is how much of him lives in Mr Rosoman, and how much is the product of an easy target. Much more popular and easy to scapegoat than other forms of land use, forestry is blamed because it might do things that others do, unremarked, already.

It is not a question of ‘blaming’ agriculture, because we are all part of the economic land-use spectrum, but of asking Greenpeace to explain its priorities. There is unlikely to be an answer of course, because explanation is not their way – does the prophet explain to the people? Of course not – he expounds with flashing eye and thunderous voice and we ignore him at our peril.

So if Greenpeace has chosen forestry as its cash cow for 1996, we are in for a rough ride, but forestry has been derided before, for most of its existence indeed, and if we had taken all the advice we have been given, would there now be any forests at all? Probably not.

Maybe Mr Rosoman will enlighten us. We will see.

John Purey-Cust

A Forest Minister for every season

And you think your job is challenging. In only ten months as General Manager of the Papua New Guinea National Forest Service I have served four Ministers for Forests and one Vice Minister – the latter not being a play on words but rather a creative interpretation of “pork barrelling”.

Papua New Guinea is a little on the wild side. From a low point in the late 1980s when forestry was acknowledged to be “out of control”, the sector has climbed to the dizzy heights of being held as a model for institutional and policy reform. A fresh new Forest Authority, with a Board and a unified National Forest Service, has replaced the tired and ineffectual national department and 19 provincial forestry divisions. New policies are in place, procedures refined, and a new Act built upon a foundation of sustainable development, value added, participatory management and equity sharing.

But the bubble has burst. We are now facing a backlash against the reformation which, with hindsight, would seem to have been pursued with a little too much enthusiasm – a case of the forest being loved to death. While donors, development agencies, the concerned public, and environmental groups continue to rejoice at all the checks and balances, most Papua New Guineans are livid. They see forests as their window for leaving the stone age and moving right into education, health clinics and the shop window. They know that timber is now worth real money and do not appreciate being told to keep their hands in their pockets.

These are customary resource owners – they are losing patience, and with some justification. Only one new timber permit has been issued in the past three years, and even that is now being crucified by outsiders who have gained locus through the new transparency and participatory approach.

In seeking to regain lost opportunities, village big-men, local, and national leaders have joined hands in resisting the Forestry Act, which they have come to see...
Urban Trees Bill

The burgeoning growth of Auckland threatens to burst its green perimeter and to inject more population into older suburbs. Market pressures for unregulated development could be perilous for trees. Hence it was in the Auckland isthmus that Tree Council was founded in 1987 and has since been centring its advocacy.

Not only do trees have their intrinsic and traditional values. Their visible presence is a seal of quality, signalling that other planning desiderata have been got right. Such as the amount of breathing space needed in these green house days, the ratio of ground left permeable, the protection of soils, and the whole assurance of a beautiful place to live in.

An Option

The Urban Trees Bill, as prepared by Tree Council for introduction to the House by Christine Fletcher, MP, is a short measure. Without being mandatory it points district councils towards an option Tree Council would firmly believe in. This entails the general protection of a district's mature trees, by designated height or girth. The aim is not to keep every tree inviolate, but to ensure any removal or cutting (other than work possible with hand-held secateurs) would need consent as a discretionary activity.

The Bill begins by adding to "matters of national importance" in the R.M. Act the protection, maintenance and conservation of the urban tree cover. To that end, territorial authorities would be required to include in their district plans express provisions, of their own devising, for protecting trees.

The conditions to be entered on any resource consent would be extended to include requirements for tree protection. Applications for any subdivision consent - including a cross lease - would have to identify existing trees. The content of a land information memorandum would have to include any rules safeguarding trees. Likewise, on any building permit issued, the requirements for the protection of trees would have to be clearly set out.

Fines Don't Deter

It has long been realised that fines are not a real deterrent to breaches of tree protection by a determined developer. The new Bill provides that the courts may after conviction suspend an existing resource consent or may prohibit a fresh application for a limited period.

The Urban Trees Bill does not impose on district councils any given set of tree protection policies. What Tree Council hopes is that a majority will follow Auckland, Manukau, Waitakere, Rodney and - in part - North Shore (like many cities overseas including all but one of the Sydney municipalities) in providing general protection on the lines suggested in Tree Council's pamphlet (1991) "Trees in the District Scheme". This would apply to mature trees, native or exotic (by height or girth), but subject to a list of exceptions, like privet, willow, acacia, pines, as well as trees grown for fruit.

The consent procedure for a discretionary activity would not be costly, or time-consuming. In most cases formal public notification would not be needed. A majority might be dealt with on the spot - with neighbourhood participation where needed - by a council tree officer acting with delegated authority.

Breathing Space

General protection involves a draconian prohibition of the cutting of all trees. It would importantly offer breathing space for considering all the options available before the chainsaws started up. Dispersions from planning rules could thus be possible, so as to retain good trees. A council might in suitable cases waive the strict bulk and location requirements for buildings. Planning would thus involve - as it should do - enlightened trade-off on both sides.

In the end it would be rare for the presence of trees totally to preclude all development on a site. But how this was to be done, how it could be designed in the interest of good trees, and how far it might fall short of wringing out the maximum economic gain, would all be matters to be considered.

These things must today be part of good citizenship and community conscience. They could also be matters of enlightened self-interest, in cities where beautiful surroundings create and enhance real estate value.

John Morton

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