

PEOPLE IN FORESTRY A REVIEW OF THE 1971 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

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After nearly half a century of pre-occupation with producing wood, pure water and other forest benefits for the general public, our Institute has looked at the stresses imposed on forest workers of all classes, on their wives and families, and at their hopes and satisfactions. To some measure this is a tardy recognition that the new science and old art of industrial relationships has not received its merited attention in forestry. Other industries have recognized increasingly that satisfactions given to the worker rank with the economic returns to the nation. Incidentally, the sequential steps of our Institute's broadening interests follow the sequence of needs for a fully functioning person, from basic needs for food and shelter to personal esteem and recognition.

Although facets of the subject overlap and interlock, an acceptable treatment was given by three panels:

Panel 1. Industrial relations in forestry:

Chairman — Bob Collins, N.Z. Forest Service
Field Forestry — Owen Boyd, N.Z. Forest Service
The Middle View — Frank Conlon, Tasman Pulp & Paper Co.
The Director's View — Jack Henry, N.Z. Forest Products Ltd.
The Union Viewpoint — John Sylvester, N.Z. Workers Union

Panel 2. Proposals to improve the image of forestry:

Chairman — Mick O'Neill, N.Z. Forest Service
The Forester — Andy McEwen, N.Z. Forest Service
The University Teacher's Viewpoint — Peter McKelvey, School of Forestry
The Worker — Maurice Pocock, N.Z. Workers Union
The Ranger — Tony Russell, N.Z. Forest Service

Panel 3. Sociological aspects:

Chairman — Jim Spiers, N.Z. Forest Service
Sociologist — Don Chapple, School of Social Sciences, University of Waikato
Doctor — Alan North, Te Whaiti
Housewife — Fanny Allen, Kaingaroa
Housewife — Wyn Rockell, Itinerant

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Additionally, papers were tabled by Chavasse, Fenton and Terlesk, Tustin and Inglis; and Mitchell and Thomson spoke to their own papers. To obtain the best continuity of thought, it is best if the published papers and précis (in this issue) are read when the reference first appears in this review.

Issues as old as the hills, of individual differences, rights, choices, and action vis-a-vis those of the employer were raised. Some were set in a domestic context; others as a facet of the current national and international social scene. Most issues received open-ended answers or spawned a multiplicity of new issues. A few were capable of mitigation by technological means — for instance, power saw noise and vibration (Tustin and Inglis). Usually, far more quantitative data are needed before many sociological problems can be identified.

Attitudes, typical of the current national ones, were explained during the first panel. Conlon, emphasizing the need for communications and mutual trust, expressed these admirably. Additionally, there were strong proposals for industrial unionism to avoid demarcation disputes and entire plant disruption by small unions. The elimination of bonus and incentive schemes was considered desirable as they merely complicate and confuse negotiations, cause violation of safe practices, and insult man's basic honesty. Issues of relative emoluments in our rapidly changing technology are world-wide and quite open-ended.

The points raised relative to "working mums" were pertinent to most industries. Work provides interest and money, and working mothers are often competent and reliable, and have high morale. However, absence of mothers from home in the early morning and late afternoon may lead neglected children into delinquency. Barbara Yule's eloquent plea for the correct assessment of a mother's priorities received acclaim, but a request for the employer to provide baby creches, a characteristic of communist countries, was unacceptable to many.

The outstanding competence of the country-living Maori as a physical worker, particularly as an adroit, considerate machine operator, was recognized. His unwillingness to accept promotion, and the paucity of pakeha labour, has led to the undesirable state where almost all staff are pakehas and almost all labourers are Maoris. This situation is all too common in New Zealand.

Each person, at all levels, sexes and ages, and in all forestry activities, must be recognized as a human being with hopes and fears, demanding communication with those around him, and yearning for a valued and assured place. When they perceive that the organization will give them the satisfactions they need, they will be able to contribute fully to its success. The significance of "perceive" and "able to contribute" should be noted carefully; it is not sufficiently acknowledged that psychological handicaps are as real to the sufferers as physical ones.

Domestic issues set against current national attitudes were related to the employer's duty to provide extra goods and

services. Undoubtedly, the employer must institute an enlightened policy, new safety practices and better working conditions. But when should he provide health services (X-rays) and educational services — mandatory functions of nominated State departments — or provide transport for pre-school and extra-curricular activities — normally a parental responsibility?

If forest villages and company towns do, in fact, create sociological problems capable of early detection and amelioration by a trained social worker, then the employer should provide such a person, fully competent and with ascribed status. Additionally, a doctor, identified with the people, possessing a status and role acquired by long domicile, is necessary to practise preventive medicine in both the physical and mental fields.

Should an employer introduce a compulsory superannuation scheme maturing at, say, 40 or 50 years, and paternally insist that workers with no supervisory or retraining potential must contribute? At what stage of such a worker's life can the decision be taken?

Discussion of forest villages and company towns raised issues common to the national scene, especially Hydro and Ministry of Works villages, although these are rather ephemeral; for instance, is the drift from Kaingaroa to Rotorua, and a general dislike of forest villages, typical of the national drift from the countryside which may, it was alleged, be encouraged by Government action? Tokoroa, now over 15 years old, and the largest Waikato town, was populated by many people from substandard housing in scattered King Country hamlets. Now these are affluent two-car families who also own seaside baches. Chapple gave a sociologist's view of this town and references to other studies.

The employer, particularly the ordinary officer-in-charge, with little time and no training in social work, is placed in an invidious position when asked to run a business enterprise and a town. All too often his village "by-laws", reputedly autocratically decided, have denied his villagers normal rights. Proposals to eliminate this by the election of a town council usually lapse through lack of suitable people. The protracted unbecoming wrangles at Murapara are in accord with this.

Slowly, and with remarkable hesitancy, the meeting decided a wide range of communities are needed to provide satisfactory lives for all, but to hasten the settling of grandparents, a stabilizing factor in any community, home ownership should be encouraged in forest villages.

Claims were made that children in forest villages do not have the rich and varied experiences so vital in the educative process before entering school, and consequently start their formal education with an inadequate vocabulary. Surely this is an indictment of parents who fail to give these needed enrichment opportunities. It also condemns our forest villages as communities too small to be viable in this complex world; too small to give satisfaction to the mother for whom pickle-making is not the highest satisfaction, or to the man with a similar attitude to the working men's club.

Small rural communities avoid some urban disadvantages — milk-bar cowboys, for instance — and may even have advantages. Small classes, when led by better-than-average teachers, are excellent for individual tuition. Typically, however, the most affluent, and hence inevitably the most able, are the first to become commuters; our own manifestation of the "brain drain".

At last to domestic matters, always remembering our setting at this point of time against the background scene.

"Who are we?" "What do we do?" "What skills do we need?"

Some people believed that forest labour is largely unskilled and that the periodic absorption of 1,000 or more unemployed may well, after due consideration of other factors, be desirable. Mitchell strongly contested this view. Moreover, forest work is not as monotonous as many occupations, and rotation within the gang and between jobs introduces variety and demands other skills. For the first time, to my knowledge, it was publicly stated that the requirements of silviculture and felling are the physical fitness and speedy reactions of youth, although with adequate experience youth may be prolonged to forty years. Some believe forestry offers a lifetime career to most workmen; this may be true in the integrated forest and plant. Thus, a boy may exercise his youthful agility slasher thinning a regenerated stand; be trained for silviculture before passing to logging at the peak of his physical strength — experienced, rational and calm. This is a sequential training. At this point, he may be retrained for less physically exacting tasks within a forest-based industry. This should lead to greater stability in forest village populations and greater identification with the company, but may lead to lower earnings after coming in from the cold. Although all forests are not linked to a plant, an officer-in-charge can supply an introductory link.

Opinions differed regarding the effects of more complex logging and land preparation machinery, and discussion was far too cursory for finality to be reached. Mitchell felt a more advanced technology demanded a more competent operator, but others felt it led more to a young man's job. Some machines may increase production, and more may be used if labour is in short supply; often machines increase costs chiefly because of the high capital investment.

Fenton and Terlesk describe pertinent features of forest labour; many are very adverse.

The paper on Rangers was tabled and briefly discussed. It was utterly depressing — to me, in particular. Entrican has been lauded for creating a ranger training scheme, the resultant cadre being the envy of many a country. Rangers are trained to be versatile, and there is little doubt that this training has stood them in good stead, for they have achieved high national positions in marketing, logging, work study, saw-milling and industrial relations. They are employed throughout private industry and hold important overseas positions. As new technologies have created new positions, so have their

skills broadened. And yet their spokesman asked repeatedly for a clear definition of what their job will be — technical, man management, or a combination of both.

Those discussing rangers and foresters were concerned about common attitudes to a forestry career. There was an inaccurate juvenile image of forestry people as Paul Bunyons, or mighty Nimrods, and not as man managers or business men working to high production standards, and subject to rigid budgetary control. McEwen's paper is a remarkably frank statement of his attitude towards both the N.Z. Institute of Foresters and the N.Z. Forest Service. Its publication is a tribute to the tolerant attitude of those bodies.

Finally, it is hard to form an opinion of the meeting and its value. The grouping of the subjects used in this report indicates the overwhelming power of national and international events and attitudes in shaping matters which, at first sight, appear to be purely domestic. As an injunction, this means quite simply: "Move with the times". But because this meeting was held, it is a fair indication that our Institute is already doing just that. Panel speakers included an Associate Director of a multi-million dollar firm and his silvicultural contract worker; a trade union official and a university lecturer; a Maori housewife and "iron man" bachelor. Such speakers, and the 180 delegates, contributing in frank objective unemotional style, could not fail to make this a pleasing milestone meeting. We certainly can communicate when we wish!

A milestone meeting to mark our broadening interests, yes: pleasing, because its conceivers wished to make more satisfying the lives of many people; but in the treadmill gloom of Packard, Parkinson and Morris, a little bewildering. Perhaps the earlier parts of Chavasse's paper should be read now.

May I express my appreciation to the organizers and to all speakers, but most particularly to Mrs Fanny Allen for her eloquent perception of the Kaingaroa mother and child.