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EDITORIAL NOTES

Forests Act, 1949.—This Act came into force on 1st January, 1950. It is essentially a consolidation of the forest laws enacted since the Act of 1921-22. Alterations and additions have been made to remedy defects and omissions which have been revealed during administration or found necessary in the light of changing conditions. There are no radical changes; many apparently new provisions were previously covered by regulations. The sections of the Act are assembled in a more convenient form with related clauses grouped together.

The title "Commissioner of State Forests" becomes "Minister of Forests," thus removing the confusion with other "Commissioners" who are members of the staffs of other departments. The "State Forest Service" becomes the "New Zealand Forest Service." The former name will not be easily displaced, though occasionally it may have suggested something less than a department of the central government. Statutory recognition is given to forest conservancies and Conservators of Forests. The provisions of the Forests Amendment Act, 1948, abolishing the State Forest Account are incorporated in the new Act; in addition, the Minister is required to lay before both Houses of Parliament such statements of accounts as the Minister of Finance may require.

"State Forests" of the earlier Act are now designated "State Forest Lands" presumably to avoid any possible confusion between forests in the legal and physical senses. Ambiguity as to the status of certain National-endowment land and forest reserves created prior to the State Forest Act, 1908, are removed. Revocation of the setting apart of any permanent State forest land now requires an act of Parliament, instead of a resolution of both Houses of Parliament as formerly.

The vexed question of fencing the boundaries of State forest lands, previously covered by the Fencing Act, 1908, is dealt with by empowering the Minister to enter into an agreement with an adjoining occupier to fence the common boundary.

Mining privileges and coal-mining rights on State forest land can now be granted only with the consent of the Minister of Forests and subject to such conditions as he may impose. Holders of rights granted after 1st January, 1950, can cut and remove timber only under the provisions of the Forests Act.

The limit of 20 chains from State Forest within which it was an offence to light a fire, if any forest produce were burnt or injured, or in danger of being so affected, is now increased to a mile. Provisions of the Forest (Fire-prevention) Regulations, 1940, dealing with the leaving of burning substances on State forest land, the provision of fire-fighting equipment by right-holders, and obligations to extinguish and report fires are given statutory authority in the new Act. Other fire provisions covering the requisition of labour, recovery of costs and the right of appeal to the Fire Appeal Tribunal are in line with those of the Forest and Rural Fires Act, 1947.

Another provision to facilitate forest protection makes it an offence to allow cattle to trespass on State forest land and, under certain circumstances, authorises the destruction of such stock. Previously cattle trespass could be dealt with only by taking civil action for damages.

Provision of the Forest Amendment Act, 1926, whereby the Minister might act as agent for other Departments of State or any local authority in the management of their forests is extended to private forest owners.

Forestry and Immigration.—It was anticipated that with the conclusion of hostilities forestry would be called upon to absorb, at least temporarily, a considerable number of returning servicemen. Virtual cessation of normal silvicultural work during the war years had resulted in a vast accumulation of work, particularly on those exotic forests where large scale planting had been undertaken in the depression years of the early nineteen thirties. In addition, new schemes were planned to achieve a better distribution of exotic forests.

But the rate of absorption of returning servicemen into normal avenues of employment proved much more rapid than had been anticipated. With buoyant economic conditions creating a keen demand for labour, and shortages delaying the provision of accommodation, particularly married accommodation, the increase in available forest labour fell far short of expectations. Nor, with competitive wage rates in industry, was it possible to achieve the desired stability among such forest labour as was offering.

In these circumstances available labour has been quite inadequate to carry on necessary forest works. Consequently, upon the Government adopting a policy of immigration, the Forest Service made known its requirements to the immigration authorities.

During the past two years upwards of 200 immigrants from the United Kingdom have been given employment on State forests. Of these it is estimated that not more than a third are still in forestry.

Several factors have contributed to this wastage ; in the initial stages selection methods were unsatisfactory, the men had little idea of the type of work and probably less of the isolated conditions on most of our forests. Others, finding the quotas full in certain occupational groups, nominated forestry solely as a means of reaching New Zealand and securing other employment at the first opportunity.

However, the later drafts from the United Kingdom have contained a much higher proportion of men genuinely interested in forestry and adaptable to our conditions. In addition to forest workers there have been a number of tradesmen who are providing valuable assistance in advancing the programme of forest buildings and servicing plant and equipment.

Worthy of particular mention are those who have passed through the British Forestry Commission's training schools gaining Forester's or Foreman's certificates. The number of such men who have so far come to New Zealand is not great, but most have quickly demonstrated a sound training and made good progress towards staff appointments. It is in just this category that we are most lacking and it is to be hoped that suitable arrangements will be made to continue the supply.

From among European displaced persons the Forest Service has so far received 15 families and upwards of 100 single men through the International Relief Organization. Mainly from Baltic countries, these people have settled remarkably well and are generally proving very satisfactory workers. It is to be hoped that their attachment to forestry will not be broken on expiry of their two years contract period.

There are to be further drafts of forest workers from the United Kingdom, and a committee has been set up to make further selection among European displaced persons. Some of the Dutch now leaving Indonesia are expected to undertake forest work here, while negotiations are proceeding with Finland regarding forest workers displaced by Russian annexation.

It is evident that immigration can play a major part in building up a trained and more permanent labour complement which is so essential to sound forest development.

In addition to immigrants employed in forestry a lesser number have gone to the sawmilling industry. There have been comparatively few from the United Kingdom, and the quota remains unfilled. Defections to other occupations have been fairly high, but those remaining are reported to be proving satisfactory. Nearly all the twenty or so European displaced persons employed in sawmilling have remained and given a good account of themselves.

The Journal.—Increased printing costs have unfortunately made it necessary to raise the price of the Journal from 5/- to 7/6 a copy. Even so, it is necessary to draw heavily on the funds of the Institute.