FORESTRY AND COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

This article is based on contributions to the forestry and communities workshops held at the 1981 Institute of Foresters Conference. The participants included N.Z. Forest Service staff, members of private forestry companies, forestry consultants, and others whose experience of forestry developments extended over some forty years in a wide variety of regions and diversity of operations. There was agreement about problems that face future development in rural regions. In particular, participants emphasised the need for better information transfer and fuller involvement of rural society in resource management decision-making.

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Other studies have surveyed the views of members of the Institute of Foresters on the changing ownership of forests (Andrew and Chavasse, 1981) and the attitudes of forest managers towards aspects of forestry (Kennedy and Sutton, 1978). However, the views of the New Zealand forestry profession about the social impacts of forestry have not, as yet, received much attention.

The forestry and communities workshop at the 1981 Institute of Foresters Conference brought together people who, in the course of their careers, have gained a wide variety of experience of the social impacts of plantation forestry. Participants were asked if, in their experience, forestry development created problems for communities and, if so, what the problems were. They were also asked to draw on their experience to suggest ways of dealing with these problems. In total, the two sessions of the study group involved over sixty people. We cannot assume that this is a representative sample of how the forestry profession views the social aspects of forestry, and in particular of how the profession ranks problems by importance. Nevertheless, we feel that the range of issues raised is likely to be typical. We have attempted to capture some of the themes to which participants gave most emphasis. We report, and briefly comment

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upon, views expressed in the workshop. We do not consider what basis in fact, if any, these views may have.

Although the trend of forestry developments today is towards integration with existing communities, the experience of most participants was with communities created specifically to service forestry developments. Some of the perceived problems of such communities are not forestry problems but problems of remoteness,

– LOSS OF BENEFITS
– SHORT RUN BOOM TYPE DEMAND FOR SERVICES
– INCREASE IN COMMUNITY INCOME BUT ALSO INCREASE IN COMMUNITY INEQUALITY
– TENSIONS OF ADAPTING TO "NEWCOMERS" AND A NEW WAY OF LIFE

RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND INDUSTRIALISATION

FORESTRY IMPACTS

SINGLE INDUSTRY TOWNS
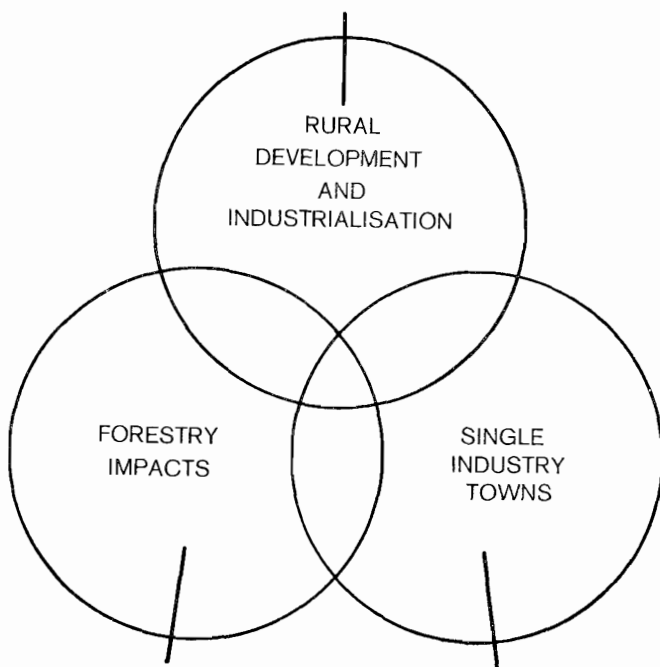
AT – ESTABLISHMENT
– GROWING
– HARVESTING
– PROCESSING

– DEPENDENCY RELATIONSHIP TENSION
– SINGLE MEN
  HIGH TURNOVER
  LOW COMMUNITY COHESION
– MONOTONOUS HOUSING ENVIRONMENT

FIG. 1

of single industry towns, and failure to integrate with existing rural communities (see Fig. 1). The difficulty of diversifying communities in remote forestry regions was mentioned, indicating the view that a wider cross-section of occupations and skills would be desirable. Forest Service housing policy was criticised as too inflexible, and it was suggested that it might profitably be relaxed to permit non-Forest Service employees, who are also involved in the economic and social life of a community, to live in Forest Service housing. However, some participants expressed the view that traditional non-forest rural communities in New Zealand present a rigidly uniform aspect and that forest communities are often, by comparison, more diverse.

The dependence of forest villages on a single economic base, with fluctuating levels of activity, was seen as encouraging transience of workers, a tendency reinforced by the perceived lack of choice of educational opportunities in remote areas, so that many forest workers eventually move closer to a larger centre in order to widen their children's range of choice of education. Participants also mentioned the inadequacy of employment opportunities for other family members, particularly wives and more particularly wives who themselves wish to follow a career, for whom employment is more than a means of supplementing the household income. Strong concern was expressed at the consequent strain on family relations, resulting sometimes in the break-up of families and marriages. It was proposed that the situation could, to some extent, be remedied by a more flexible policy regarding purchase of Forest Service housing, and by encouraging forest workers to develop a small-holding land base in order to give them a more permanent stake in the rural community.

Other contributors whose experience was, perhaps, drawn from different regions, offered a much more positive view of forest communities, seeing the possibility for successful integration with agricultural communities. For some small-holders on marginal land, a seasonal forest income may be the only way of maintaining rural viability. More prosperous farmers can look to forest villages for a supply of seasonal labour. Forest developments can generate sufficient extra demand to make some local services viable, though it was pointed out that a much more deliberate policy of using local services was necessary and that forest growers, in particular N.Z. Forest Service, should avoid excessive reliance on central stores and a centralised purchasing policy.

Forest development has brought regular wage employment in some rural areas, sometimes to people who have never previously had a regular income. It is all the more important, therefore, that forestry is not seen to depend too heavily on "transported-in" workers. Serious social tension could be generated by transporting in workers to localities which have high levels of unemployment. It was suggested that the present trend is towards more daily commuting from larger centres to forest jobs, although the trend is perhaps not yet so pronounced for State forestry as it is for private forestry.

Looking to forest processing communities, participants saw a danger of more intense industrial relations problems, in particular the vulnerability of single-industry, single-employer towns both to industrial action by small groups and to changing international conditions, particularly where processing involves a joint venture with foreign capital and preferential access to a market.

Mixed feelings were expressed about the single-men's camps which are a feature of many forest communities; some recalled them with horror, others spoke of the advantages of having all meals prepared and of being able to take off hunting as soon as the working day ended. It was pointed out that forestry wages are now sufficiently high to ensure that if workers live in camps they do so by choice, and that in general forestry workers can now afford their own housing if they find the camps uncongenial.

The problems which will need to be solved for future forestry developments are more likely to be those of integration with existing communities. The group offered many insights into the difficulties sometimes encountered in making forestry acceptable to rural society. The most strongly expressed theme was that forestry is not clearly understood. Insufficient attention has been given to informing rural residents about forestry developments so that suspicion and mistrust abound. Forestry has been inadequately planned for, so that provision of servicing facilities has been out of step with sector growth. Rightly or wrongly, forest developments are seen as a threat to an established way of life; farmers feel that, if land goes out of farming into forestry, unit costs in servicing facilities such as freezing works and dairy factories will increase. Also, forestry adds to the demand for local labour, and is seen as having played a part in bidding up wage rates. To the farmer, too, the "reversion" of marginal farm land through scrub to plantation forestry is a permanent reminder of the "failure" of farming on that land. Established farmers see forestry as "bringing in" a new professional and

intellectual élite, and they are reluctant to cede influence to these "outsiders". Participants detected both occupation and race bases to this antipathy. Residence in rural areas of New Zealand has traditionally been based on land ownership and there is prejudice against an influx of non-land-owning wage workers.

When land does "go back" from farming to forestry, this can be perceived as "causing" rural depopulation. A farmer may lose his only neighbour for miles around, particularly in remote parts of the South Island. Furthermore, the old neighbour-to-neighbour way of dealing with matters of common interest is lost; the farmer finds he is now dealing with a member of a bureaucratic heirarchy who does not have authority for independent action in many matters. It was suggested that officers in charge of forests need more authority to act as individuals. Forest interests are often seen as retreating behind a corporate identity in conflict situations, and rural residents sometimes fear that forestry will not make a full contribution to the non-economic life of the community.

The change in land ownership associated with afforestation usually means a change in the rural power structure. Decisions about the land, once made within the community, are now made elsewhere; in a regional centre or in Wellington; even, in the case of afforestation projects involving foreign capital, in the boardroom of some multinational giant whose interests can scarcely be expected to coincide, of necessity, with the well-being of local residents. Though these problems are institutionalised in large-scale forest ownership, the group saw partial solutions in encouraging local small-scale processing of wood from existing forests, and provision of incentives for small-scale ownership and management of forest blocks. Such smaller scale developments should integrate more readily with established rural life.

It was pointed out that procedures of the 1977 Town and Country Planning Act have forced forestry into a defensive stance, and turned objective evaluation of land uses into a conflict situation. This tends to obscure the fact that forest developments have been beneficial to many communities, for example, by improving vertical social integration, that is, "filling in the gaps" between the "squirearchy" and farm labourers. Provision of regular work in remote areas has helped to maintain Maori kinship structures, and several participants have observed that forest employment has been a basis for closer racial understanding between Maori and pakeha. It was, however, noted that Forest Service upper management remains pakeha dominated.

COMMENT

Taking an overall look at the range of views presented at the workshops, it seems reasonable to suggest that those involved within the forestry sector perceive two sorts of conflict. On the one hand, there are those problems which are seen to be inherent in the way we "do forestry" in New Zealand, while on the other there are issues which develop out of the "myths" which are perpetuated about the relationship between forestry development and the social and economic well-being of our rural communities (see Fig. 2). The implications of large-scale corporate land holdings and the suggested link between forestry and rural depopulation serve as respective examples of each conflict type.

On reflection, the importance of this distinction lies in the possibility that the route to solving problems that fall within each
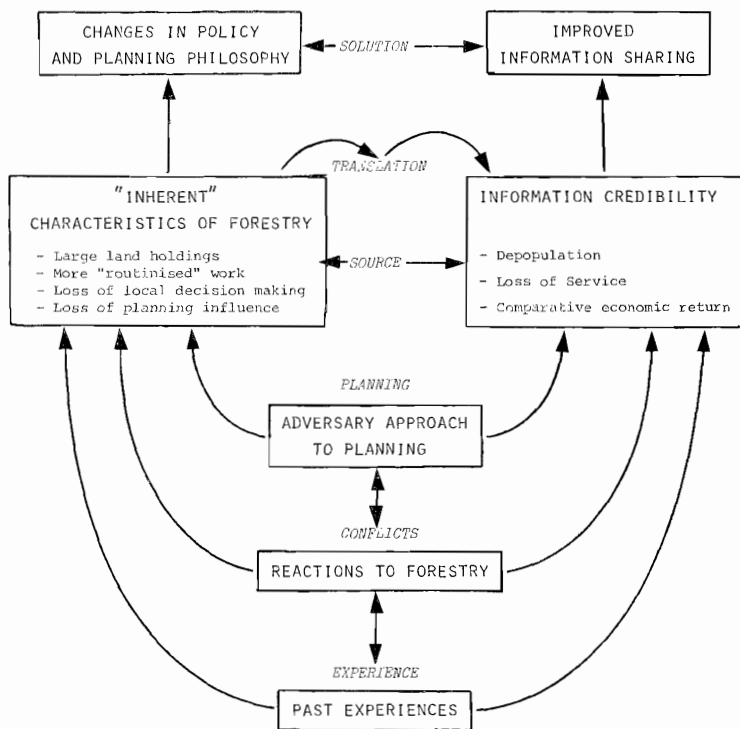

FIG. 2

category could well be different. For example, issues arising from
the characteristics of exotic forestry in this country might be
more effectively solved through recourse to changes in the way
we "do forestry", that is, to policy changes. The strong calls
from the meeting for increased concern about the extent to which
information is both distributed and discussed may only be effective
in helping to overcome those difficulties in land-use integration
that are "myth"-based. The impact of greater information inter-
action on the former type of conflict, however, could well be
minimal.

Interestingly, these two paths to possible solutions to problems
associated with growth in the forestry sector come together with
the call from the workshops for a greater emphasis on increased
local involvement at an earlier stage in the planning process.
Such a call does suggest that many within the sector see
considerable difficulty in attaining the goal of effective land
resource management in a planning environment that is dominated
by centralised decision-making involving a legalistic process which
almost guarantees conflict and misunderstanding. Implicit in the
opinions voiced was the feeling that a change in planning
philosophy would go some way towards encouraging the creation
of policies that are more sensitive to local needs and to the
greater transfer of information relevant to all aspects of regional
and community life. This feeling appears to arise from the
practical frustrations of working within a multi-sectored rural
economy — frustrations that are aggravated by pursuing solutions
to differing land-use goals with the aid of limited information
that has no common basis. In our adversary planning systems,
the lack of appropriate information, to some extent, does force
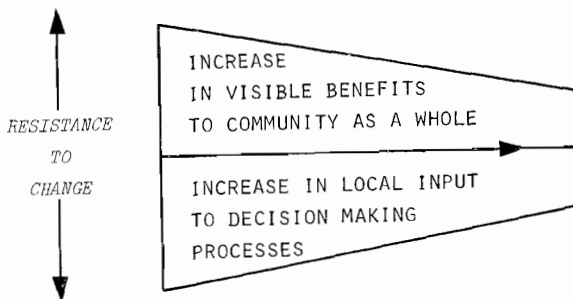parties to emphasise, as a strategy, the undermining of their

FIG. 3

opposition. There can be little doubt that such a strategy is conducive to the sort of development that is devoid of considered assessment and good sense.

Ultimately one must take account of the view that support for development is greatest from those who stand to gain from any growth proposed for a particular region (Maurer and Napier, 1981). The workshop groups were sensitive to the contention that social and economic advantages of development are more likely to be realised where the basis of support is broadened. This, in turn, can be achieved by broadening the distribution of advantages of regional and community development with a view to ensuring that all involved in the planning process gain something from the proposed change (see Fig. 3).

Although the appropriate policy trends, together with their practical repercussions, may not be easy to bring about, the realisation within the sector that changes are required in many facets of rural planning does provide a useful starting point.

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