

Prepare to meet thy doom – but not in quite the way you expected

The end of the world has been well prophesied for a long time now as divine response to human wilfulness. In early days error was seen to be mostly centred below the belt but our view of that as of other things has progressed, and now we see it to lie in misuse of the planet itself – pollution, exploitation, deforestation, overpopulation.

But a new spectre has crept into the developed world unseen, at least in the United Kingdom (UK) – gentrification; gracious living now takes precedence over the old values of sustainability and self-sufficiency. In the environmentally sensitive society of the future the vulgar business of the satisfaction of material needs is something that is done somewhere else by someone else. So when all the world is a park, who will attend to these needs?

Developing countries are becoming increasingly suspicious that this is seen to be their ordained role and indeed the message now coming from the developed world bears that out. In the old days of Christian missionary endeavour the message was to do as we do, to become like us. Now in the environmental wave that has changed: the receivers of the message are being told to follow a path which the missionaries themselves openly reject at home.

The message now is: "Do as we say, not as we do". Understandably it gives rise to increasing resentment, likely to be loudly voiced at the World Environment Conference.

A series of United Kingdom publica-

tions and newspaper articles introduced this new trend to me late in 1991. It started with a discussion paper on UK forestry put out by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), "Forests for the Future".

Quite properly this document pays most attention to the impact of forests on birdlife, but, perhaps surprisingly for a conservation statement, it goes on to deny any priority at all for wood production as an objective of forest management.

Surprisingly, because the UK spends 7 billion pounds/year on wood imports (50 million m³), mostly taken in unsustainable fashion to the detriment of other people's forests. A carefully detailed justification of this continued destruction is given – it is uneconomic in terms of treasury guidelines based on internal rates of return (IRR) to grow trees in the UK, very little imported wood comes from the tropical rain forest, most from temperate forest, and the forest "need" of a developed country is for parks and habitat, not the satisfaction of its resource demands.

Yet the UK is a country once 90% forested, with the best forest climate and soils in Europe. It has reduced its forest cover to 5%, with another 5% in generally despised plantations, well below the EEC average of 25% and ahead only of Holland and Ireland. It now urgently seeks to cut back the agricultural binge of the postwar years and hesitantly includes hints that trees might have a place in the list of alternative options.

The RSPB paper, fraught with warnings of the risk of tree planting, makes it clear that little is likely actually to be done.

A little later there was a report in the "Independent" newspaper of a proposal for tidal barrages on the Mersey and Severn rivers to generate electric power. There was an immediate response from the RSPB, attacking the proposal on the grounds of habitat disturbance, and very much was made (as in the forestry paper) of the inability of such a long-term proposal to meet treasury economic guidelines.

Yet the article claims that this sustainable energy project could supply nearly 10% of the UK demand for electricity.

The only sustainable source in use is hydro power, now essentially fully developed: fossil fuels, increasingly imported, supply most of the rest and there is a small nuclear contribution. There is a strong and persuasive nuclear lobby based on the evil emissions of fossil fuels, but prevailing winds carry acid rain to Scandinavia and the greenhouse effect is a new idea, so no-one yet takes much notice.

There was a similar swift reaction to a proposal to generate electricity from wind. The Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE) immediately rejected the idea out of hand because of its possible effect on landscape values.

In all three cases sustainable resource use was rejected outright without hesitation or apology. The assumption is that whatever is needed will continue to be supplied by other countries, and that it is there that the responsibility for sustainable resource use lies. An army of missionaries fans out through the Third World bearing that message.

Not surprisingly this moralistic view causes increasing irritation in the developing world: if 5% forest cover is enough for the UK, why, they argue, is it not enough for Brazil, Indonesia, Malaysia? If the UK, consuming vast quantities of imported wood, sees no reason to either abate its demands or provide for the future and equates economic forestry with primitive behaviour, why should they not take the same view. After all, all started out with a 90% cover of natural forest.

The apparent view that their rain-forest "matters" while temperate forest has little serious value adds to their fury.

Though painfully flawed, these arguments are hard to refute when countries

New Zealand Forestry

invites you to submit material
for inclusion in this publication

We accept:

- articles on a wide variety of forestry topics;
- comment on forestry or Institute of Forestry affairs;
- items on current events;
- letters to the editor;
- items from local sections;
- advertising.

Comments, letters, news items, and Institute news need to be with the Editor at the beginning of the month prior to publication.

of the Developed World who have the financial and intellectual resources to develop more sustainable and less exploitive patterns of behaviour seem only to pay lip service to the concept.

In these countries the power of the mainline conservation groups is now very large – the RSPB was recently described as “more powerful than the Conservative Party” – and they represent the most affluent, best educated and vocal sections of the community (also it must be said, the most consumptive). But increasingly their power is being used to defend an achieved position of lifestyle and affluence, rather than conservation principle.

Yet developed nation status does not necessarily depend on domestic deforestation, as the following comparison between two of the largest wood importers shows:

	Japan	UK
Land area (million acres)	93.4	60.5
Population (million)	123.1	57.2
People per acre	1.32	0.95
% forest cover	67%	10%
Annual wood consumption (million m ³)	108.5	54.5
Annual wood consumption per head (m ³)	0.88	0.95
Source of wood supply		
Homegrown	30.5%	11.7%
Imported	69.5%	88.3%

On all counts the Japanese appear to do rather better: despite a denser population, a more extreme climate, more difficult topography and soils and great war damage, they have conserved a much greater share of their forest cover, supply a much larger share of their wood need and consume individually slightly less. But who is universally pilloried as the destroyer of the world's forests and whose record is entirely undiscussed?

So, from where should the missionaries come, and where should they go? Where are the lessons to be learnt and who needs assistance in finding the truth? It begins to look as if, in this area at least, the aid thrust has got turned upside down.

Would it not be useful for savants from the developing world to study where countries like the UK went wrong, how they lost their forests and what cultural attitudes militate against their return? The Japanese appear to have handled things better, so perhaps there are lessons to be learned there too.

Maybe we can look forward to some World Bank studies of this nature. The vision of a gentrified planet is not an appealing one, nor is it sustainable.

J.R. Purey-Cust
International Forestry Consultant

Kiwi xenophobia stunts progress

New Zealand must back away from Kiwi xenophobia or distrust of foreigners if it is to progress its forestry sector.

That's the opinion of Director of Investment Banking for Fay, Richwhite & Company Limited, Mr Rob Cameron, speaking in the latest Forestry Bulletin, the official magazine of the New Zealand Forest Owners' Association.

In the front page article, Mr Cameron says “forestry is a specific example of where our anxiety and suspicion of foreigners could cost New Zealand jobs, income and growth opportunities. Like many other sectors in which New Zealand is competitive, we must take a worldwide perspective, see the benefits of working in a cooperative environment and maximise the return for New Zealanders.”

Enormous Profits

Mr Cameron says the limited availability of hardwoods worldwide coupled with a strengthening global demand for clear woods, have seen hundreds of millions of dollars of foreign investment poured into New Zealand in the last couple of years.

He says the new processing technology learned in some recent joint ventures will push New Zealand a further five years along the learning curve – “and that technology is transferable within the industry”.

“These partnerships play to our strengths, not our weaknesses. The foreign partner provides the finance, technology and the market access, and we provide the management, skilled labour and resources. Put that together in one joint venture deal and the profits can be enormous. Moreover we benefit further from technological transfer and are able to continue renewing or replacing the resources used.”

Postscript If the above appears to be unduly critical of the United Kingdom, so be it: that is a product of English being my mother tongue and present residence there. In fact, the phenomenon is not at all confined to the UK, but seems to be commonly spread through both the European and American developed worlds.

It is also present in New Zealand, where sustained yield forest management at home is still criticised whilst being actively preached to our Pacific neighbours.

J.R. P-C

Sufferers of Kiwi xenophobia forget that in many instances of foreign investment, land ownership is not moving out of New Zealand hands – merely the right to cut or harvest forests, says Mr Cameron.

“We can retain as much control as we need and still enter into relationships that can generate a lot of benefits for the country.”

Millions Invested

Mr Cameron, says that in the last couple of years foreign investment into former Crown forests represents some \$440 million, while added value processing ventures are in excess of \$200 million. Add to this the respective investments by International Paper and Weyerhaeuser into Carter Holt Harvey and Forestry Corporation; then the total amount of foreign investment in New Zealand in the last two years is in the vicinity of three-quarters of a billion dollars.

Managing Director of Groome Poyry and forestry representative on the Foreign Direct Investment Advisory Board, Colin McKenzie says he holds absolutely no amount of anxiety over the level of foreign investment ploughed into New Zealand so far.

“Look at Juken Nissho's plant in Masterton; it's 100% Japanese owned but it is employing New Zealanders and adding value to jobs in the Wairarapa area. If you wait for that sort of capital to come along, in New Zealand terms it may never arrive. In terms of New Zealanders being upset about foreigners being here they have to realise that apart from providing the capital, foreign investors are also providing solutions to problems of marketing and distribution channels abroad. Some of those countries are pretty difficult to crack if you try to operate on your own.”

Nevertheless, the President of the New Zealand Forest Owners' Association, Bryce Heard, says that while foreign investment in forestry can be positive for the country he warns against a policy of unconditional overseas investment being developed in search of a quick-fix solution to unemployment.

Retain Control

“We have tended to give up the ownership of resources far too early. The control of resources should remain in New Zealand's hands as far down the