

It is interesting to look back. For decades the Forest Service, through its battles with the sawmilling industry to reduce the cut in Podocarp forests, and its protection of millions of hectares of mountain-land beech forest, had been the undisputed leader of forest conservation in New Zealand. The conservationists had caught it up and were passing it. Perhaps the Forest Service was here at fault, but I still wonder if the insistence of the environmentalists in this instance was right: the economic and social advantages of a local beech/exotics pulp mill would far outweigh any disadvantages that could be claimed for this course of action. New Zealand cannot in fact afford to sterilise potentially productive resources. It is entirely possible that if the decision had to be made today it would be exactly the same as in 1973 (NZFS 1973).

A. P. Thomson

Lindsay Poole responds

On Craig Potton's own admission, he was not the person to have been asked to give "A public perception of plantation forestry", but, even so, one would not have expected, from any invitee, an attack on the wicked Forest Service about the "infamous" beech scheme in 1971. It was too good an opportunity for Potton to miss a one-sided onslaught. Hardly the way to pursue "peace and enlightenment" which he claims has come about.

The "infamous scheme", in some form, will inevitably rise again because what Potton forgot to say was that the nation owes the West Coast a huge debt. The deliberate destruction of the greater part of the potentially usable land resource, and the manageable rimu forest that grew on it, will be repaid somehow. Politicians, helped substantially at one stage by gold-miners, never swerved from the path of clearfelling rainforest, the policy that was blindly followed throughout the country despite continuous Forest Service protests.

Evidence of rimu management possibilities worked out by the Canterbury School of Forestry, extensive investigations and trials by the Forest Service and observations by many people could not change the chosen course until almost the end of the forest destruction.

Where were the conservationists then?

Beech forests are still there only because the soils under them are poor agriculturally and the wood not in great demand. Experimental work pursued throughout more than half a century has amply confirmed that, with variations, the southern beeches can be managed for sustained production in the same manner as is practised so successfully with European

beech. Leonard Cockayne enunciated this more than 80 years ago. He included human beings in this formula because they were part of the ecology of the country. The conservationists slammed the human beings. They like neither the idea of beech management nor the clearing of poor beech forest for exotic tree planting. Now they admit they need the latter and the needs of people who have been dependent on forests for their livelihood should be met – forsooth, the West Coasters.

Future Governments are certainly not going to be idly contemplating a resource of this nature and extent. Surely the West Coasters who have been "done in the eye" can share it with the birds and possums. Potton's codswallop of "peace and enlightenment" will land us once again in the laps of short-term Governments trying to promote long-term policies.

Wide debate is what is wanted.

A.L. Poole

References

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Footnote

The editorial board is pleased to provoke wide debate, and to that end, we appreciate the contribution from the three Fellows above.

The comments section of this journal was designed to give people the chance to voice informed opinion, in the knowledge that their arguments are subject to critique. Craig Potton's comment was no different: nor, by inclusion, does it infer agreement by either the editorial board or the NZIF Council. However, an insular profession is an unhealthy profession ... and a little needle goes a long way. Ed.

1984 or Don't do as I do

Firstly: shoot our editor, or better still, remove him from treeless Otago where clearly he has been subverted by pastoralists. How else to explain the arboreal tokenism illustrated in his May editorial?

Rather more disturbing is the respect which we seem to be expected to give to Dr Thies' views (the May Journal). I read the article several times and at the end of it was none the wiser except to feel if he says grass is blue then we'd better believe it or else.

Dr Thies slates Scandinavian forestry for having simplified the biota and ends up by saying that "generally speaking the vast majority of indigenous or local people will guarantee a forestry that can sustain the ecosystem in the long run".

The problem is that he has already said that they don't in Scandinavia, despite the fact that a very large part of the forest estate is individually owned in small holdings – the local people, he says, have not sustained it properly.

True, he throws in the Lapps as "native" people whose forest has been exploited, but that has very little relevance to the whole, and seems to be there just to confirm his apparent view that "local" and "indigenous" people are necessarily third-world inhabitants – a condescending and rather racist view.

In our case the Maoris (as we are talk-

ing about indigenous people) destroyed in quite a short time a third of our natural forest estate without any outside aid or influence, and in Britain, where I now am, a forest cover of something like 90% is now 5%. The bulk of damage was done well before the industrial revolution and by people whom now we would certainly class as living close to nature.

I worked with Finns for a few years, and found them at times a little self-satisfied. I thought about their standards of forest management: so occasionally I needed them on the subject that Dr Thies raises, of over-simplifying a natural forest.

Not so, they said: in earlier times a great deal of Scandinavia had been cleared by peasant agriculture, a process which on poor soils and in a difficult climate had led to soil degradation and a constant expansion of clearance in search of fresh fertility.

The situation had come to an end in Finland, they said, in a time of war between Sweden (in whose realm most of Finland then lay) and Russia. The Swedish King had marched his army, mostly Finns, to attack the soft underbelly of Russia and had there been defeated.

As a counter-stroke Peter the Great sent an army of Russians ravaging into Finland and the end result was a great lack of Finns, particularly males of breeding

age. It was, I was assured, referred to as "the time of the wheel barrow" in memory of the vehicle in which the few remaining male dotards were wheeled round the country to do their duty if they could.

Now this story may well have been a little elaborated for my benefit, but I have heard the general synopsis elsewhere sufficiently often to believe it. Such a situation of second growth certainly does not condone exploitative practice, but neither does it support Dr Thies' pre-lapsian ramblings and implication of a primeval paradise lost.

A rather similar attitude prevails in Britain where the natural forest has been so long destroyed that treelessness is taken in many areas as the natural state. The result is bizarre: conservation groups and learned societies, confusing cultural values with ecological values, stand like St George, sword in hand to repel the forces of development, only to be assaulted from the rear by the virgin Nature whom they claim to defend.

For as the processes of biological degradation which formed most moorland and heathland are checked, and burning and over-grazing become less common, so the forest surges forth. But many of these degraded sites, mistakenly seen as in natural equilibrium, have been declared "sites of special scientific interest" where changes of the order which nature now requires may not be tolerated. So a literature has grown up on "maintaining infertility", on control of over-exuberant hardwood regrowth by "scrub bashing" (over-grazing by cattle), and burning.

The general antipathy towards trees (or perhaps more correctly a general confusion over the natural state of the landscape) lies deep. In their national forest policy of a year or two back the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds declared Britain's timber deficit an irrelevant argument in the cause of tree-planting because the import share from rain forest is small.

Yet Britain imports per capita three times as much as the Japanese and as such cannot help being a significant contributor to world deforestation.

Perhaps the whole thing was best expressed by Simon Jenkins in *The Times* (October 23, 1993) when he expressed his opinion of fox-hunting by setting it alongside afforestation and child abuse.

Now the point of all this is quite simple: just how relevant to us (or to anything except local prejudice) are such opinions? Are they expressions of universal truth, urban isolation or an excess of righteousness where talking and abstraction rather than listening and looking hold the floor?

Are the people who hold these views

role models for us, heralds of the wrath to come, or have they simply eaten too many beans? Are they, to us in our search for truth, just irrelevant?

I think they are largely irrelevant: the problem with all this global village stuff is that it starts with the unadmitted assumption that someone else carries the can as aware and caring richer societies reform their ways. Inevitably the bearers of that burden live in the third world. The problem is that the global village is upstairs/downstairs and its proponents live upstairs.

H.G. Wells describes it in "The Time Machine" when his time traveller lands in a future society where the beautiful people lead elegant lives in the sun only to be dragged out at night by the deprived and ape-like people who toil for them under-

ground. They end up in the pot. Is that sustainability? I suppose it is, of a kind, but is it Dr Thies' vision?

We have come a long way very fast. We have in fact done a great deal better than most in the field of forestry – disagree? Well, who has done better?

Are we not confident enough to seek out those countries, learn what we can from them and then formulate our own path towards sustainable forest management?

Away with colonial cringe!

John Purey-Cust

The Editor humbly requests that any executions be performed with a minimum of pain and mess – Ed.

'Trees are good, Trees work'

Laurie McDowall*

The establishment of exotic forest in New Zealand has been a brilliant technical success. In other respects it has been a major failure. This conclusion is based partly on hindsight but also reflects some long-held misgivings about our approach to forestry in New Zealand.

Long ago the late Sir Reginald Smythe said that his company (NZFP) should stick to trees. In fact he was saying: "Stay with the core business and do it better." My company and others in the sector did not follow this advice. In answer to a question, Reg Smythe also said that "planting trees is an act of faith". Again he was saying something that he, and others, instinctively knew to be correct but which could not be supported by a logical analysis of the investment economics involved. Reg Smythe's "act of faith" comment was made long before we knew anything about the depletion of tropical forests, before acid rain in the northern hemisphere, before the advent of ozone layer holes and the theory of the greenhouse effect. These subsequent events tend to justify his intuitive conviction about planting trees.

If you saw the movie "Wall Street" you may recall the remarks of Gordon Gecko as he addressed the stockholders of a pulp and paper company in a takeover situation. He said "greed is good, greed works". That may be so, but I found myself, when thinking about forests, paraphrasing Mr Gecko and saying "trees are

good, trees work". Few people would disagree. But if you want a forest you must plant it. Nature gave the world forests for nothing but that was a "one off" deal and won't be repeated. All sorts of things have made it possible for us to plant exotic forests; technically our forests are a great achievement and we are very fortunate to have them.

Where we have failed is in our conception of forests as part of our economy; what the real need for them would be, and in our conception of their appropriate size.

When Britain joined the EC we were given a clear signal that our economy was going to change in a fundamental way. Loss of the lucrative British markets reduced our overseas income and made it impossible to protect our inefficient secondary industry any longer. This in turn destroyed the so-called full employment situation. In the 20 years since that time we have done little about our situation. Farm exports still provide our hard currency. We survive by being price takers for commodities in over supply and by successive devaluations which mostly increase overseas debt, increase on-shore costs and over capitalises the investment in farming land, thus perpetuating the cycle.

We have not developed a response to these problems. We are 20 years down the track and we don't have an effective forest policy that could turn things around.

We have no real concept of the optimum size of our forests and how they might be used to change our basic econ-

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