

Moved to tears

Sir,

I owe John Groome a great debt of gratitude. His letter entitled "Institute's 'independent' stance timely as forestry reaches new crossroads" (N.Z. Journal of Forestry Vol 46(3)) moved me to tears (literally) as I recalled the events that caused my "martyrdom" back in the 1980's and, more particularly, read John's extremely kind words about Kit Richards and myself.

The details of the event that I was involved in are history. The 1984 Labour government had decided to undertake an "environmental restructuring" of the public service. Incidentally, there just happens to be a "comment" by Lindsay Poole this event in the same journal under the heading "More to sustainable forestry than just management".

As one of the many NZ Forest Service employees whose careers were at significant risk, I chose to provide my fellow workers (in all parts of the business, from administration to forest management) in Otago and Southland with a suggested list of issues that they could use if they wanted to write to their MP to object to the process being planned. This is no more than anyone else interested in self-preservation might do. However, the list got into the hands of someone who chose to use it to expose pro-active public servants to Television. I had two choices – either I decline to stand up for what I believe in and let the protagonists of environmental restructuring win without any opposing voice, or give it my best shot. I did the latter, without any thought to the consequences for my "safe" career.

The result was astounding. We didn't change the government's mind – nothing would have done that – but I got over 60 letters, faxes and phone calls from all over New Zealand, thanking me for standing up to the bastards, and offering their moral support through what they new would be a consequential ordeal for me.

And ordeal it was. My unwitting accomplice and I were summoned to Wellington the next day. The day began with a torrid dressing down by a very irate Andy Kirkland, Director General of Forestry at the time. I never saw Andy more angry, and do not hold this against him one bit. Our next ordeal was a very lengthy interview with a senior member of the State Services Commission. His job was to see if I could be fired for speaking in public against government policy – oh yes, this was 1980's New Zealand, not Russia, and I suspect the same still applies today. Freedom of speech is not for everyone, you see.

After several hours of this treatment, both together and singly, we were "released" to go home with our tails between our legs. But the ordeal did not stop there. We were kept waiting some weeks for the "results of the inquiry" to be released. In the meantime, both the local Conservator of Forests and the Minister of Forests expressed their disappointment at the lack of judgement I had shown by being drawn into a TV interview to defend myself against a less scrupulous critic of my actions who had his own agenda.

I doubt that my actions have every really affected my career, as the Forest Service was going to be shut down regardless, and indeed, I was "lucky" enough to get a

job in Andy Kirkland's ill-fated NZ Timberlands Ltd.

But my real reason for writing this letter, was not to give you the background, but to tell you why I was moved to tears. You see, after the dust had settled, I tried to be a good little Public Servant again, so I asked my boss if I could reply to all the letters of support that I had had. I was told that this would not be a wise move, so I filed them. I came across them all a few years ago, and felt very sad that I had not defied authority one more time. You can have no idea how much those letters, faxes and phone calls helped me though all this. While "the establishment" was content to see me made an example of, the peer support was phenomenal.

So, thank you John Groome. Thank you for four things. Firstly, thank you for giving me the opportunity to grieve again a lost cause – tears of grief. Secondly, thank you for giving me the opportunity of thanking publicly all who showed their support for me at that time – tears of gratitude. Thirdly, thank you for reminding current members of the Institute how important it is for its members to make a stand on industry issues outside the comfort of our own cosy little group – tears of pride. And fourthly, thank you for your extremely kind and thoughtful words – tears of humility.

Dennys Guild

John Johns calendar

Sir,

The Otago/Southland section wish to record their congratulations to the group who produced the calendar as a tribute to the memory of John Johns.

What a mammoth task it must have been to access all Johns' photographs from the archives and then at arrive at the final selection – which no doubt he would have been proud.

It truly is a tribute to his outstanding ability to have been able to produce such a complete record of the forests and New Zealand landscapes and not neglecting his great love of trees, particularly the Beech forests, so dear to him from his homeland.

Thank you to you all for such a handsome production, of which you all should be very proud.

Percy Parker

**Southern Hemisphere
Forest Industry Yearbook.
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