

REPORT

CHAPTER I.—POST-WAR FOREST POLICY

1. *General Legislation and Administration.*—Characteristic of forestry in most English-speaking countries, that in New Zealand suffers from numerous misconceptions, invariably propounded by separate minorities interested in only individual aspects of forestry. One belief is that the only way to preserve the country's bird-life and to conserve its water and soil resources is to reserve from any working whatsoever all forests occurring over an altitude of 1,000 ft. above sea-level. Another is that the best way to preserve and perpetuate a forest is likewise to reserve it against either any exploitation or any silvicultural improvement whatsoever, the theory being that Nature cannot be bettered. Still another is that tree-planting, whether it be of indigenous or exotic species, is a panacea for all forestry ills. Unfortunately, no one of these postulates is practicable, all being based upon false premises. Only by a broad policy of conservation and use can the forests of the Dominion be effectively managed within the limits of the public purse to make a balanced contribution to the national economy. It is entirely feasible for the forest not merely to stabilize agricultural land, conserve water-supplies, support bird-life, supply recreational facilities, and give inspiration to all people, but also to provide the country's timber. The first President Roosevelt spoke well and truly when he said: "Forest conservation is the preservation of the forest by wise use." This has been and should continue to be, the basic concept of New Zealand's national forest policy.

Few people have stopped to calculate that were the Dominion solely dependant upon overseas countries for its timber-supplies at the present time it would take £17,500,000 to land our requirements in New Zealand. With a favourable trade balance of only £22,000,000, it can reasonably be claimed that New Zealand's timber-supply functions as a key item in the national economy, and that its perpetuation—and, better still, its expansion—is vital to the country's social well-being and to the maintenance and betterment of living conditions.

The Forest Act, 1921–22, and its subsequent amendments, under which the State Forest Service has now functioned for twenty-five years as the Dominion's organized forest authority, has proved a sound piece of legislation. Its basic strength lies in the continuity of use which it ensures for State Forest land, which cannot be alienated except by resolution of both Houses of Parliament. In the British tradition of *laissez-faire* land-management, however, it was shaped to deal almost exclusively with State forests, owners of other lands being left free to use or misuse them at will, unless they desired to bring them under the operation of the legislation voluntarily, either for purposes of management, &c., or for fire-prevention.

Three events have transpired to bring into sharp focus this fundamental weakness of the existing legislation. First came the get-rich-quick afforestation boom of the 1924–28 period. Although the undesirable financial promotion and management aspects have since been corrected as the result of a Commission of inquiry, neither continuity of land use nor effective technical management has been provided for. Then with the war came the need for cutting of produce from recently established exotic forests. Fortunately the war emergency legislation was available to encourage restocking and to give adequate protection to the owners against the serious fire hazards created by loggers and millers, but its use cannot be continued indefinitely. The third event was the disastrous series of fires in Taupo and elsewhere in 1946–47. These showed the voluntary fire-protection provisions of the legislation to be inadequate.