

FOREST EMPLOYMENT

(1) One of the most disturbing features of forest operations is the difficulty of securing the required personnel; other avenues of employment are attracting the best workers, and the type of man most likely to develop into a skilled and efficient forest employee is not available to the Forest Service. During the critical man-power shortage of the immediate post-war years it was logical that employment difficulties should be accepted with little question, but the problem can no longer be dismissed so lightly. It is obvious that there are fundamental reasons why forestry continues to be at a disadvantage in the labour market. The Forest Service places a good deal of reliance on its departmental staff-training schemes as the solution to its general staffing problems, and these training schemes are proving their value and giving very good results. So far, however, it has not been possible to widen the training scheme to include working personnel, but even if this could be arranged immediately, the setting-up of a training scheme would not in itself give the required results. The reasons underlying the exceptionally high turnover in forest employment reported in Chapter VIII obviously go deeper than this and therefore call for some inquiry.

(2) One of the contributing causes is the fact that, so far as the exotic forests are concerned, forest work has suffered from a widespread impression that it is seasonal and temporary rather than continuous and permanent; hence its failure to appeal to the man interested in a career with steady and permanent employment is not surprising. This is a misconception which needs to be corrected, inasmuch as it is only planting that is seasonal, and the planting boom is past. Management and utilization activities, on the other hand, offer year-round work of a permanent and varied character; consequently it is no longer the casual worker who is sought, but rather men who will take up forest work because they are convinced it offers them stable employment of a nature which inherently appeals to them. In other words, forestry now presents an opportunity for the skilled craftsman.

(3) Another contributing factor undoubtedly has been a general impression that forest employment means living conditions of a primitive kind as measured against urban standards. That undoubtedly was true up to the end of the depression of the early "thirties," but conditions have been greatly improved, and the day of the tent has gone forever. For single men either cabin or hostel accommodation with central facilities for meals is provided. The Standard Forest Service cabin with modern built-in furniture has been universally acclaimed as the best of its kind in either Australia or New Zealand. Married accommodation is limited, it is true, but an active housing programme is in operation, and houses are being built to the standard of State rental houses. Greater emphasis must be placed on the provision of married accommodation, however, for it is the home which is the foundation of any stable community. This is well recognized by the permanent forest industries in Scandinavia, some of which, in addition to donating land for the building-site, make considerable monetary grants to their employees to enable them to have their own homes. Linked with any improvement in general living conditions there must also be an improvement in the amenities available; sport and recreation, amusements, facilities for shopping, educational and medical services, &c., are all necessary to overcome that inherent lack which prompts people to shun forest employment for work nearer town. These things have not been overlooked: the standard of amenities has been considerably improved in recent years, and is still being improved as the development of permanent forest communities proceeds.

(4) Finally there is the question of comparative rates of pay. Other avenues of employment can and do offer better wages, and this places forestry at a disadvantage in the labour market. It is essential, therefore, that the wage level be improved if an efficient and stable forest personnel is to be built up; conversely, a high wage level is justified only if it results in the acquisition and retention of skilled craftsmen.