

Letters to the Editor

Sir

The paper, "The Philosophy of American Forestry Education", read by Mr. W. G. Dallas at Pomeroy School on April 22nd, 1945, and subsequently published in "Irish Forestry" Volume XXII No. 2—Autumn 1965, could have been of real benefit to Irish Forestry were it not for its complete lack of objectivity.

In these times, when there is a generally acknowledged need for an improvement in all forms of education and training, Mr. Dallas' suggestions that Foresters (Technicians he would term them) could be trained in eleven months instead of three years, is revolutionary. His assertions that graduates on the other hand should undertake even further study, shows quite clearly that he is more concerned with advancing graduate interests than in "saving taxpayers' money and the students' time".

There is very little common ground between forestry in the United States and here. American Foresters are concerned with the management of 34% of that huge land mass, much of it virgin forest, which obviously requires very different techniques, skills and training from that required for pioneer forestry in this country.

The educational systems also are entirely different. In Ireland, the availability of University education to all of those of sufficient intellectual and moral calibre necessary for posts in the higher echelons of any organisation or profession is not systematically ensured. Apart from basic educational requirements, the sole qualification for entry to University here is the ability to pay for the course. The number of University scholarships available in this country is small enough to be insignificant in a discussion on the matter. In the absence of a system of selection based on ability to benefit from a University education, the Universities do not necessarily get the most suitable students, and many of higher intellectual capacity enter walks of life not requiring University education or take other courses not requiring the high financial outlay of a University education. This is not the case in Britain or the United States, where there is much greater availability of University education to suitable students. What a golden opportunity Mr. Dallas missed by not appealing that State-run training schools be attached to one or other of our

Universities, and the course raised to degree standard—not a very big step. I am sure the students entering would gladly forfeit the weekly allowance paid to them towards meeting the increased cost incurred. The educational qualifications at entry would need to be raised, of course, but in our view this action has in any case been too long delayed.

Mr. Dallas' comparisons lack validity with remarkable consistency. The non-graduate Forester in Ireland undergoes an intensive three-year course in practical and theoretical forestry, and then spends at least a further five years as an Assistant Forester before he is considered ready to take charge of a Forest. This is the man the author seeks to equate with the American technician who gets an eleven-month course under the kind of Boy Scout programme he found in America. The subjects covered under this programme are conveniently omitted.

Those entering the Forestry profession in Ireland have done so in two ways — the University and the Forester Training Schools. Both of these sources have provided Foresters of sufficient calibre to occupy posts in the higher echelons of Irish Forestry. There is no evidence that a preponderance of the talent coming into the profession has found its way through either one of these channels of entry and it is in fact unlikely that it will, in view of the absence of a rational system of selection for the University. Both modes of entry provide the scientific background to Forestry and an introduction to Forestry as an applied science, to enable students to develop by experience, observation and further study, a fuller knowledge and appreciation of Forestry as a practice. It is obvious that such development depends to a great extent on the individual and his intellectual capacity for such development. We must recognise that not all those who enter the profession through either of these ways necessarily have the basic equipment with which they can develop themselves as fully as a profession such as Forestry requires. It should be remembered too, that possession of a University degree does not necessarily preclude one from being a technician any more than the lack of one would exclude one from being else. This is probably universally true, but in practice it is particularly true in Ireland because of the confusion in our system of education already mentioned. Mr. Dallas would have "a profession of University trained Foresters, and a separate cadre of forest technicians". Despite the fact that he wants to create this division, he expects the result to be harmony! It would not be good for any service to divide it as advocated by Mr. Dallas. The effect of his paper on the Society of Irish Foresters, the members of which are in the main professional Foresters, cannot be healthy.

While we can accept that the views expressed in the articles and notes in the journal were not necessarily the views of the Editor or of the Society of Irish Foresters, we would remind the Editor that the constitutional object of the same Society is to advance and spread in Ireland the knowledge of Forestry in all its aspects. That the

Editor should agree to publish a paper which blatantly seeks to advance the interest of one section of the Society's members at the expense of another, does him little credit, and is certainly not calculated to encourage Foresters to "chip in" and join actively in the Society—the theme of his Editorial in the same issue of "Irish Forestry".

Mr. Dallas certainly did not woo Irish Foresters to the Society's ranks when he stated that the Forester "may be seen as a truly earthy individual with gnarled and often dirty hands, rather than a scientific manager of some of the nation's most important natural resources". Does he imply that it is beneath a Forester's dignity to be proficient in the practical as well as the scientific side of Forestry? Does he fear for the graduates' inability to be practical? Or does he simply fear the cold draught of competition and wish to close the door?

Irish Forestry has developed its own tradition, a fund of experience and knowledge, and a character of its own shaped by time, reverse, successes and the dedication of its Foresters, both graduate and non-graduate. No serious flaws in the structure suggest that a radical departure from the established pattern is required. The Irish Forester of to-day is no "status quoist". There is, of course, always room for improvement within the framework, improved dissemination of literature and new information, and many other areas in which the Society of Irish Foresters could assert considerable influence. Mr. Dallas' paper is partisan and strikes a discordant note that has reverberated irritatingly through the ranks of the profession.

In conclusion, I would like to acknowledge the many letters received from Foresters throughout the country, who generously gave me leave to use their submissions in writing this letter.

Trusting you will see your way to publishing this, which sets out the views of our members.

Yours faithfully,

M. P. G. HARBOURNE,

Hon. Gen. Secretary.

Institute of Professional Civil Servants, State Foresters Branch.

In publishing Mr. Dallas' article it should be noted that it was one of three papers, together forming a symposium which, it was felt, should be reproduced in its entirety. This paper was the airing of a point of view which had certain attributes for some and unacceptable points for others—nothing is wholly condemnatory on any one side.

A provocative piece of work demands criticism—this is in its inherent nature. Criticism as such may not be a bad thing, is often desirable and is positively so when it is constructive. It was in the hope of stimulating constructive thought that this article was published. This it achieved as many of the recommendations of the Association of Professional Civil Servants, Forestry Branch, as recorded in the above letter surely testify.—Editor.