

President's Address

1. The great event during the year in the forestry world was, of course, the Sixth World Forestry Congress.

No less than 2,000 members and 700 associate members from 93 countries assembled during the month of June in Madrid.

Our society was well represented by our Vice-President, Mr. Mooney, Professor Clear our current President and Messrs. Galvin, McEvoy and Parkin.

The central theme, not unlike the subject of Professor Black's paper to-night was the role of forestry in the changing world economy.

The concern of the Congress members was focused on meeting the growing demand for wood raw material, on the amount of wood available and its utilisation but there seemed to be a shift of emphasis from resource conservation to resource planning and management.

In the plenary sessions the Congress affirmed that there is not now, and need not be in future any overall world shortage of wood.

Previous congresses and the continuous work of the F.A.O. have borne fruit, governments have been alerted and if current programmes and trends are continued the long expected world timber famine need never happen.

The Congress considered that more attention now needs to be given to an investigation of the economic base of expenditure in forest

work and of the ways and means of reducing this expenditure. Above all cost/benefit analyses or other methods of evaluating benefits must be the base of sound forest management.

An important factor in developed countries is that manpower is becoming in short supply and the management plan must, therefore, provide for increasing human productivity.

This factor will in time also affect developing countries.

In his closing speech the President of the Congress, Don Francisco Ortuno Medina, the Director General of the Spanish Forest Service, stated that "Above all we must produce cheaper timber and make the forestry enterprise economically viable."

He stressed that "A necessary condition for the achievement of this aim is a more thorough study of the relationship between costs and profits in the forestry enterprise. It offers the only means whereby we shall be able to speak to financiers and economists in their own language." He reiterated "We are now convinced that our task is not so much one of preserving renewable sources but rather of developing them and improving their management."

"Foresters must, therefore, pass beyond their traditional frontiers and take a more active part in drawing up national development plans."

"Implicit in this objective is the granting to foresters of a sufficiently high position within the administrative hierarchy and recognition of the great contribution that may be expected by reason of their experience in long-term management of extensive areas and essential resources."

"In order that foresters may successfully perform these tasks it is necessary for them to transcend the limits of classical forestry science to strengthen the teaching of economic and planning methodology without losing sight of the traditional wellsprings of our forestry training and background."

He concluded "We must persevere in our efforts to identify and quantify the benefits offered by the forestry sector in terms of soil protection, water management, preservation of fauna and recreation. Only thus shall we be able to mould public opinion and convince governments that money must be spent to keep up and enhance these functions of the forestry sector and arrive at an equitable decision as to who pays the bill."

It is strange that these words spoken to a world audience should be so apt and have so many lessons for Irish Forestry.

2. Coming closer to home this switch of emphasis is already very noticeable in Great Britain where future large scale expansion of the forestry programme will be largely confined to areas where it can produce an economic return of about 7%, or to areas where it can contribute to the solving of social problems. These areas seem to be defined as Scotland, Wales and the Northern 4 counties of England.

As a result in the last annual report of the Forestry Commission the total area of forest land acquired during the year in England was a minus quantity. The total area being reduced by 11 acres.

In Scotland, however, the planting programme is to be increased from 30,000 acres to 36,000 acres per annum leaving only 9,000 acres per annum for England and Wales as the overall programme of 45,000 per annum is not to be increased.

3. Last year in my mid-term address I talked of how acquisitions in Northern Ireland were beginning to slow down and how this position might become worse.

This was reflected in a reduction of the planting programme to 22,000 acres in the Republic and to 4,600 in the North.

However, in the North the era of the freeze and the period of severe restraint and the rise in unemployment which followed have altered the scene at least for the time being.

Offers of land have increased to the point of embarrassment and for the first time, since 1958 unemployment relief schemes have been started.

One of the advantages of working plans has been amply illustrated as most plans contained programmes of work to be undertaken by possible future relief schemes. At very short notice these have been implemented and the total labour force increased by 33%.

Side by side with this apparently backward step two other economically important events have been taking place in the North, following to some extent the existing policy in the Republic.

(a) Experimentally several different methods of marketing produce are being tried including roadside sales by tender, contract felling and contract thinning with the aim of securing the best possible return.

(b) A work study officer has been appointed and a team of two works study foresters are about to be selected for training. At a later stage a decision as to the best type of incentive payment will be made in the light of their recommendations.

Mr. Gilmore Warnock the Works Study Officer was greatly impressed by the help and co-operation he received on his visit South from Inspector General down to leading worker.

4. The main event in the Society's year was the publication of "The Forests of Ireland" and I would now like to refer to another piece of writing which it may have inspired.

In October a series of five articles appeared in "The Irish Times" written by Mr. Michael Viney under the general title of "Down in the Forest."

The articles were extremely well written, penetrating and hard hitting and I have yet to meet a forester who was not amazed at the author's grasp of a very involved and complex subject.

In his last instalment he wrote "These articles have sought to be provocative and critical, especially of the economic basis of the State's afforestation programme."

"The assumption that forestry is inevitably a profitable use of public money is so widespread that the points of challenge must occasionally be made clear. The scale of the planting programme, the type of land assigned to forestry, the kind of tree it will support, the immediate costs and potential returns, the issue of comparative land use, these deserve critical attention from a people who have encouraged their Government to believe that "trees are a good thing"—and to spend £4½ million a year on growing them. Otherwise the forests could become not a national asset but a national liability."

We waited for the rush of letters to the editor, but we waited in vain. How can we explain this silence when so many lesser subjects fill the correspondence columns? Does, no one care?

I have concluded that the general public, while very interested in forestry in a general way, were baffled by the technical and economic details produced by Mr. Viney. The public appears to be ready to trust its foresters to spend the funds allocated to them in the best interests of the nation as a whole.

This while being very complimentary puts on us a great burden of stewardship. If we are to discharge that responsibility we must ensure that we know precisely where we are aiming and what our objects are.

Mr. Viney put his finger on many soft spots. One of these was the failure to define forest policy.

We never quite know whether we are a social service or an economic undertaking.

Mr. Viney concluded that morale would suffer if forestry terms of reference, especially in the western countries were clearly defined.

I cannot agree with this view. Nothing is worse for morale than to be left without a proper sense of purpose.

A firm forest policy appears to be hardening elsewhere, it is time that some hard decisions were taken in Ireland.

Our Society has a great part to play in providing a forum for open and informed discussion where these matters can be debated and our minds made clearer on the many aspects of our forestry role in this rapidly changing world.

5. I have greatly enjoyed my period of 2 years as your president. It was made easy by the devoted work of the council and especially the office holders who carry on the day to day work between council meetings.

It was a difficult year financially and I must mention especially the good work of Mr. Tom Moloney our Treasurer and Mr. Desmond Robinson the business editor who have kept the society solvent without the loss of our assets.

Our Society has now almost completed its first 25 years of existence. I think we have much in which to be proud and grateful as we look back and see the manner in which it has grown and developed.

We remember particularly the late Professor Mark L. Anderson whose successor in the Chair of Forestry at Edinburgh we are welcoming this evening and the other 30 Foundation members many of whom are still with us and quite a few still in office on the council. It is fitting that one of them has been re-elected as your president for this silver jubilee year.
