

President's Address

Before going on to review progress here at home, I feel it would be useful to look at the state of Forestry in other parts of the world.

Continental Europe has for centuries set the lead in forestry — particularly in the field of silviculture and one naturally looks for trends there.

It is disturbing therefore, to learn from the reports of the various countries submitted to the Meeting of the European Forestry Commission held in Rome from the 15th - 19th May, 1967, that the economics of European forestry have become a matter of growing concern. With wood prices remaining stable and forest costs rising — the profit margin in many European countries has narrowed. Indeed net losses are being reported in a growing number of forest enterprises.

On the other hand Europe's foreign trade in wood and wood products shows a widening gap in both quantities and values. One would assume that the home producers would take advantage of this increasing home demand, but the problems of European forestry are compounded by traditional adherence to a costly and labour intensive form of silviculture — an expensive and highly destructive game population — slow growing and slow maturing species and top heavy administration.

The growing imports of forest products influence European timber market prices. It is not thought desirable to control imports so as to give the home grower an advantage. An improvement in the economics of European forest enterprises has to be sought through lowering production costs rather than increasing the prices for standing timber.

The greatest impact on future production costs, we are told, will be achieved through further mechanisation in felling and extraction — in mechanisation of planting — in concentration on high yielding conifers on high yielding land, in rationalisation of tending tree crops,

from grass cleaning to pruning and thinning; concentration of thinnings; concentration of final fellings — including clear cutting on larger areas; wider spacing in plantations, consolidation and concentration of forest areas.

That there is a real threat to European forestry, as present practised, can be judged from the reports of overcutting in order to make ends meet — of wholesale sales of small private forests as development sites, of lack of interest in private forestry and so on.

The professional foresters who have been examining the problems of European forestry have diagnosed the main troubles and are prescribing remedies.

It appears that more than ever before, forestry practices are being affected by:

1. The rapid upsurge of technology, the growing fund of scientific knowledge and the increasing developments in allied fields such as agriculture and the biological sciences.
2. The development of the economy and the changed or changing position of wood as a raw material.
3. The flight from the less developed and rural areas and the changes in social conditions.

The fundamental changes in forestry that were ushered in around 1948, some twenty years ago, are now beginning to make an increasing impact, notably the success of man made forests in New Zealand, South Africa and the tree farming movement in the U.S.A., and the remarkable studies in research on tree physiology — tree genetics, tree nutrition — soil science, particularly in the U.S., Japan and Europe. The unravelling of the mechanism of photosynthesis, the uptake of soil nutrients, the role of microorganisms and enzymes in tree nutrition, are leading to a clearer understanding of the relationship between the soil and the plant.

The time is passed when all that is needed to make a selection of species is the naming of a few indicator plants and a glance at a soil profile. The forester must recognise that more than one-half of the production increase in European agriculture is due to the use of fertilizers and one quarter each to soil preparation and plant breeding. Foresters have only begun to use fertilizers and selected plant material and to prepare the soil.

Silviculturalists visualise that before long, man-made plantations, with high yielding tree strains — probably clonal material set out at final espacement like poplars will be the rule rather than the exception. These orchard like stands will be kept weed free and will be fertilized and sprayed with insecticides and fungicides as required by machines. The optimum date and type of cutting will be precisely determined by field probes — just as is done today with most field crops from corn to grassmeal. Finally the production potential of the

trees and the site will be known and will be kept at peak level by an accurately calculated application of plant nutrients in an acceptable form.

If these orchard like forests are to serve the needs of wood based industries they have to be large enough, high yielding and concentrated so that the scale of the industries can be large enough to be economic. The policy must be to concentrate efforts where they will give the best returns.

The growing population and the increasing prosperity in the cities and towns give more people more leisure time and opportunity to get out into the country. Tourism has become a major source of income for this country as it has for many European countries.

Foresters must take opportune measures to ensure that enough of our suitably located woodlands are designed and maintained to satisfy the growing demand for recreational facilities. It appears that the type of silviculture in recreation areas must be along very traditional lines, with natural regeneration, long rotations and indigenous or native looking species. This type of forestry may well be handled to cater for the requirements of high class decorative wood trades which are bound to flourish in affluent societies. It would be most unwise for forestry to ignore the trends and possibilities.

The rapid changes referred to have led to many changes and amendments in forest policy and forest legislation in Europe. The serious situation of private forestry is recognised and massive aid is available in most countries. In Denmark, planting grants, now cover half the afforestation costs and new plantations on waste land are exempted from rates and taxes for 60 years. In the Netherlands subsidies for afforestation cover up to 80% of the total costs and 5% of the budget of the State Forest Service has been set aside for subsidies for associations interested in purchasing and restoring forests. Since 1966 The Dutch State Forestry Service has been charged with responsibility for Silviculture and Landscape Architecture. It is also increasingly involved with the authorities concerned with the management of nature reserves, town and country planning and recreation. The increased demand for recreational facilities has made it desirable to involve private woodlands to an increasing extent and the State now offers grants of up to £2 per acre per annum to woodland owners who are prepared to keep their woods in an attractive state and open them to visitors.

The wood processing industry in the Netherlands is concerned about the future home supply of industrial wood. It has now established the Industrial Wood Foundation which will keep the whole question of industrial wood supplies under review and has the special task of promoting and subsidising the planting of quick growing species by land owners of all kinds.

Coming nearer home the General Review in the Annual Report of the British Forestry Commission for 1966- reveals that the respon-

sibility for forestry in England was to be transferred from the Minister of Land and Natural Resources to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food as from 16th February, 1967.

In June 1966 about half the Headquarters Staff were transferred to a new office in Basingstoke under the Government's decentralisation scheme. However, most of the senior officers have remained in London which is still the centre of administration.

The report shows that afforestation in Britain is running at around 54,000 acres of State planting and 32,00 acres planted by private owners.
