



# Principles

## ENTIRELY JUST THOUGH NOT ALTOGETHER POPULAR

*The final of our articles on the theme of environmental protection on private land is an abridged version of last year's Sanderson Memorial Address, by Professor John Morton, Professor of Zoology at Auckland University, a member of the Forest and Bird executive and one of New Zealand's best known conservationists.*

**T**he battle for our publicly owned forests could soon be over. There remain no good reasons ... (in economics, timber need, export or employment policy) why the Minister could not halt indigenous logging by administrative order tomorrow. This probably won't happen. Political inertia, grudging resentment of the conservationists, foresters' engrossment with techniques that have now become pointless, may be too strong.

But if it did happen, we ought not to spend too long in congratulation. Because the great problem would still remain that is with us now, and that no conservation body has properly confronted: the saving of indigenous environment, especially forest, in private hands, that is today under intensive threat, all the more alarming for being so fragmented and widespread.

You won't need me to remind you where the urgent problem spots are today

- The superb lowland podocarps of the Waitutu coastal forest, owned by the local Maori Incorporation.
- The Catlins coastal forests of south east Otago still unsaved, with the Clutha County Council wavering and reversing upon its own scheme of change, while a mobile chip mill, like St Peter's devil, 'prowls about seeing what it may devour.'

- Kauri coming on to the market from fellings of privately owned bush in the north, whether being cleared for exotic forestry, or by selective extraction of prime trees.
- The host of little remnants of northern forest, of puriri, taraire, kohekohe, falling casualty to farm development encouragement loans. Forested Maori land being cut for the cash crop ... kauri sold, often totara wasted, as happens constantly where parcels have been leased to the forestry companies; or are being privately pine-planted with encouragement grants.
- The clearing of regenerating forest — some would call it 'mere scrub' in the north, with kiwi rescue programmes operating like rape crisis centres!

Against all this, our effective conservation response won't be to wave frustrated arms, trying to save one bit after another from clearing or logging. But crisis reaction like this constantly happens: last ditch appeals to supporters to raise money, the Government to subsidise it, and a little bit more land to come into public ownership. 'If you want to save it, buy it ... or persuade the Government to buy it' — so runs the common assumption. Compensate the owners out of what they want to do; and claim that they are legitimately entitled to do what they want on 'their own land'.

With this contemporary approach, there are several things wrong.

### No socialist land policy

*First:* I don't want to see all the choice environment coming into public hands! I want as much of it as possible to continue permanently in private ownership. I am convinced this is the best place it could be with private or family vision and tradition; and with pride and initiative for what would be collectively no one's responsibility.

It is well that I'm not a socialist when it comes to land policy. For there wouldn't be any chance of such a political blueprint being effective in today's New

Zealand — to save environment, or anything else. Our Labour Government are not socialists: or at least on the available evidence we'd have to find no case to go to trial. Nor would they appear to be conservationists, out of any deep or traditional understanding. They tend to understand the land less than agrarian conservatives; because they don't tend to hold it, or if so, they don't primarily value it for working and farming.

*Second:* Some of those agrarian conservatives have, however, developed exaggerated expectations. This could be true of some of those in the Canterbury landed tradition, with the Elworthy pressure to freehold high country grazing areas.

But, *third,* other chief conservation problems with land come not today from locking up, but insensitive development. I find it unthinkable that the fee simple of land entitles an owner to do what he will with it, to develop it to the ultimate or alternatively be entitled to compensation for the loss of this development potential, by the rest of the community.

### God will make no more of it

To devise a code, then, for the treatment of private land in New Zealand will be a complex task. Not just to prevent Northland Forest or Catlins being cut or sold, or making bush clearance harder. It will entail some regard for the sort of society we want to live in, where the environment is a resource in which we all have a beneficial interest. We shall need to consider a little history, economics, planning, and and rating law, remembering all these things are far too important for the citizen to leave to the experts.

To begin: LAND is a resource calling for special social policies. It is that peculiar sort of property called 'real', and as such has certain characteristics. It is immobile. It is scarce. It is for practical purposes fixed in supply. God will make no more of it (Napier earthquake or reclaiming harbour boards apart). There was (generally) no cost involved in its creation.