



whereupon its exemption from rating would become permanent. Either the owner or district planning authority could decide this.

The first of these latter options means the land would be the subject of a voluntary covenant, to maintain its present environmental quality unimpaired. It would become like much of Britain's National Park system, including the national coastline, still predominantly privately owned.

The covenant would be registrable with the QE II Trust, or with a Nature Conservancy. It would run with the land, against the covenantor and subsequent owners, assignees or heirs. The Trust or planning body would enforce any breach.

The cost of survey, fencing and ongoing conservation would be borne by the Trust or local authority. Rating valuation would be nil. Value upon probate, for estate or succession duties would also disappear. The value upon ordinary sale

Ecosystems such as kauri forests demand preservation, as they take so many hundreds of years to return if destroyed.

Photo: Terry Fitzgibbon

would follow the free market.

Lost rating revenue would be restored to the local authority out of a Government Environment Conservation Fund. Thus the people would bear the burden of safeguarding fine environment in the national interest. But remitted rates would be restored only in proportion to that part of the Scheduled Environment in its area that had been placed under adequate planning protection. Here would be another incentive for the local authority to act with promptness and liberality.

There is no question here of 'nationalising' the development value, as was the philosophy of Harold Wilson's Community Land Act of 1973. Here in distinction, no-one would be harvesting the development value, for it would be eliminated in favour of conservation and enjoyment.

Such land should not be liable for rates. Rating at present has two main functions: the first is the financing of local works and services; second, the accumulating sum taken in rates is the anticipatory levy on the prospect of capital gain from development. Its peculiarity is in being extracted in advance from the landowners at large, for a gain that many might not wish to realise, rather than levied afterwards upon those that have actually recouped a gain.

## Will Voluntarism Work?

I would hope these incentives would bring an appreciable flow of Scheduled Environment into protection voluntarily. It would seem so desirable to do this by free consent, that I would prefer to let some be lost, rather than for protection to be seen as a source of inequitable or bureaucratic threat.

But other questions of equity will also arise from owners unwilling to enter into covenants. Should the willing be left to carry the whole burden? What could be done to bring uncovenanted environment under similar protection?

Cases might also arise where trustee or corporate owners lack the power to encumber the land, or charge it with a covenant.

Here a useful procedure could be what I have previously advocated as PPOS (permanent private open space). The owner would permanently keep the title, inalienable by sale or disposable by will. Existing use would generally remain, but with the requirement — as under a covenant — that the environment would not be detrimentally altered. Such a zoning would be applied at the instance of a local (= district planning) authority, or a regional, or maritime authority. It would not come under inspection with each five yearly scheme review, but would be 'permanent' so far as permanence is possible in planning.

A final sort of rating concession might follow where former rating had already been heavy. Here, with covenanted land, some rate restoration might be made, not in cash, but by suitable issue of interest-bearing Government stock, representing in today's values, the accumulated sum paid in rates over — say — the 20 years past.

These measures I have been suggesting could be among the policies our Society could be thinking through and advocating. They would achieve some regard for the long term and crisis action would no longer be necessary as each new piece of threatened environment was brought to notice. Above all, fine environment, so far as possible, would be left in private hands. Then might it be said of us, that Royal Forest and Bird has given signs of caring about the land and whole habitats, not birds and specimen patches alone. And as it was written of William Rolleston, pioneer of Mt Algidus: "He has had the noble audacity to advocate principles which if not at the present time altogether popular are entirely just."

