

# Public Service

by "SUNDOWNER"

I WOULD be on thinner ice than most people if I joined in the current criticism of public servants. My experience as a public servant was brief; but it was long enough to make me wonder, not what public servants do for their money, but how those who provide so little money get such loyal service.

There was seldom a day during my twelve years in Wellington when I felt that I could relax. There were days when I felt dull, days when I felt lazy, days when I felt both, but since no one else seemed to get dull or lazy on the same days, the pressure was never lifted. It was sometimes an ambitious self-seeker who prodded me, sometimes a man who was as fearful of vacuity as claustrophobes are of enclosing walls; but it was generally someone who had learnt habits of discipline and hard work, and learnt them and become their slave in the public service.

I renewed acquaintance with some of those slaves last week, and came home wondering how any government finds, inspires, and keeps them. I know that virtue is its own reward, and why some of us therefore always feel so poor. But what is the reward for, say, the director and managers of the three agricultural research stations near Hamilton? What government or taxpayer deserves their zeal or their competence or their diligence or their patience? What have the rest of us done to make Ruakura, for example, one of the important animal research stations of the world? Who but its director and staff have carried its fame to Cambridge and Edinburgh, to the hills of Wales, and the great spaces of Australia and the United States? When we talk glibly, and impudently, about bureaucracy and red tape, about autocratic officials and lazy underlings, do we mean our ten or twelve overworked judges, the men who design and build our hydro-electric stations, the men in the Department of External Affairs who advise, guide, and

many times every year steer politicians through the shoals of international intrigue, the director of education and the inspectors of schools, the men who made the Rakaiia bridge, the creators and controllers of our State forests, the irrigators of Central Otago and mid-Canterbury, the conquerors of footrot, mastitis, and contagious abortion, the fighters against hydatids and facial eczema, the men and women on guard against diphtheria, small pox, typhoid and poliomyelitis? If we include those, and others as important as those, our criticism is the babbling of irresponsible yahoos. If we exclude them, we exclude the thousands who work for us with them, including the 200 men and women I saw last week in the Waikato putting money into our pockets while we sleep, removing sickness and waste and superstition and ignorance from our animal husbandry, and the blight of barrenness from unthrifty soils.

"[H]OW many sheep do you really own? One or two?"

"How many do shepherds usually own?"

"I don't believe you have any."

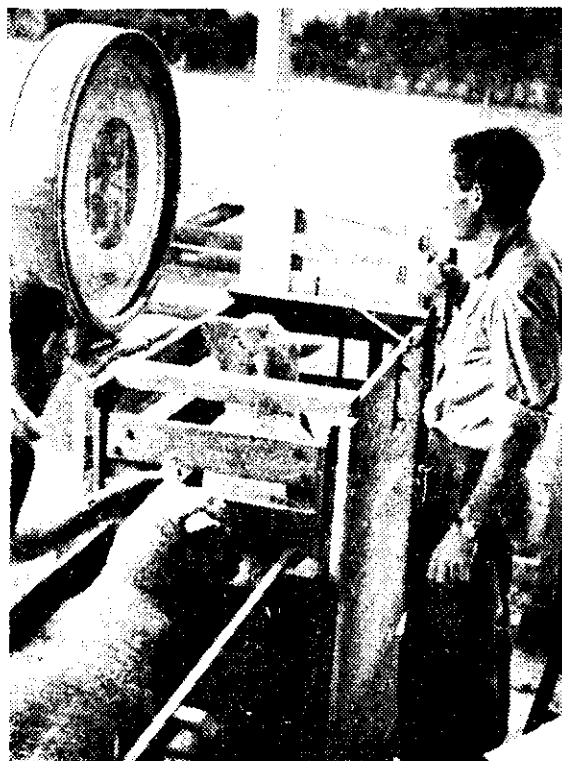
"I don't like you enough to be anxious to influence your beliefs."

"That is just rude."

"But very true."

"Go to Hell."

"It would be pleasanter there, wouldn't it?"



Department of Agriculture photograph  
**WEIGHING SHEEP AT RUAKURA**  
What have the rest of us done to make Ruakura famous?

"[R]EES don't argue," Harry said. "They do as they're told." Then he climbed up 30 feet, chopped through a trunk nearly two feet in diameter, and leaned back while it crashed to the ground. It was a dead weight of nearly a ton, and it fell precisely where he said it would. A yard either way would have been disastrous. I ceased to be worried.

Then a tree did argue, encouraged by the wind. It was the case in a hundred where a sudden gust, an

interlocked branch, a weak strand in a rope, and the perversity that even inanimate things sometimes display combined to shout "No!" The trunk started to fall the right way, then turned suddenly and went the other way, making nonsense of attempts to stop it. But it argued a split second too long. If it had not paused at the very peak of its swing it would have crashed through a building and made the contents too small to gather up. But it cocked an arboreal snook at us there, and its pirouette carried it out of harm's way. God, Joyce Kilmer and a fool poet came into my mind together, but I was careful not to speak.

Why should I have spoken? A stand of 50-year-old trees, occupying an almost impregnable position of danger to anyone who disturbed them, had been brought down safely one by one. Two axes and a saw, three wedges and a blasting gun, a thin rope and two men past sixty—one a Pakeha and the other a Maori—make them into split lengths of four feet in less than three days. It was more than a fine display of energy and skill. It was a demonstration that aroused wonder and admiration and confidence and gave me a glow to be merely a spectator. Will summed it up neatly when he was paying the piper: "I would like to be a Communist for five minutes so that I could give you each a Stakhanov medal."

(To be continued)

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**TWO ROUTES to England TRAVEL**  
**SHAW SAVILL**

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hell of a lot more than I ever saw. I remember the time I asked him why they burst one kind of fieldgun shell in the air. And he told me. That was when I was twelve.

They crested the slope and took their time towards another thicket, the sun punishing them now with its afternoon heat. The birds at Joe's belt were stiff and dried in the sun, and black where blood had run and thickened. The day hung heavily upon them both now, although each for a different reason.

Fainy was trying very hard not to let show in his face the beaten-up way he felt inside. He felt broken and empty and the gun was heavy now, aching his arms. He had forgotten about watching the dog.

Then came a quick, threshing alarm, and he saw what appeared as the greatest, most colourful bird in the world leaving the grass from ahead of the dog, a great flash of colour lifting up into the air in urgent though effortless flight. He had no thought of action, or of killing. Somewhere he knew Joe was standing, with his big double gun, and

his confidence, and his manhood. And the paddock had become very wide and everybody was watching—the whole world, it seemed; and all his life he would remember the colour of the great pheasant's plumage as it rose into the sun. Very carefully he put the end of the barrel over his vision of the bird, and down until he saw the dot of his sight upon it.

All of the explosion seemed to be in the butt coming up to jump free of his shoulder, and sharp against his cheek. Still in his vision beyond the gun, the dead bird crumpled in the air and went down heavily into the grass. Right away the dog was active.

Fainy felt for the first time how his heart was beating. The powder had got in his eyes and was stinging.

"I got him, Joe," he said, needlessly, trying to keep his voice steady. He knew it would be all right now; he wanted to shout.

Joe straightened up from taking the bird from his dog. There was a kind of smile about his face.

"That wasn't the worst shot I've ever seen, anyway," he said.