

IAN WATSON

# Fighting Over the Forests

ALLEN & UNWIN 1990

E-book edition 2020

First published in 1990 by Allen & Unwin, Sydney, Australia

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This e-book edition published 2020

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National Library of Australia

Cataloguing-in-Publication:

Watson, Ian

Fighting Over the Forests

Bibliography.

ISBN 0 04 442208 3 for original paperbound edition

1. Forests and forestry—Australia—History.
  2. Forests and forestry—Economic aspects—Australia—History.
  3. Forest conservation—Australia—History.
- I. Title.

Catalogue details for original paperbound edition:

333-750994

Library of Congress Catalogue Card No. 90-55036

Typeset in Bembo and Gill Sans using  $\LaTeX$

For the past decade, environmental politics in Australia has been dominated by conflicts between timber workers and conservationists. Terania Creek, on the north coast of New South Wales, was the scene of one of the earliest and most bitter confrontations. The acrimony aroused and the gulf which separated the protagonists persists to this day.

Is such conflict inevitable? Can common ground be found between these two warring camps?

In seeking answers to such questions, Ian Watson draws on the words of over 50 conservationists, timber workers and foresters—ordinary people caught up in a dramatic environmental struggle. *FIGHTING OVER THE FORESTS* offers insights which illuminate many of the current forest controversies and seeks to advance the debate on this enduring dilemma.

Overview, original edition (1990)

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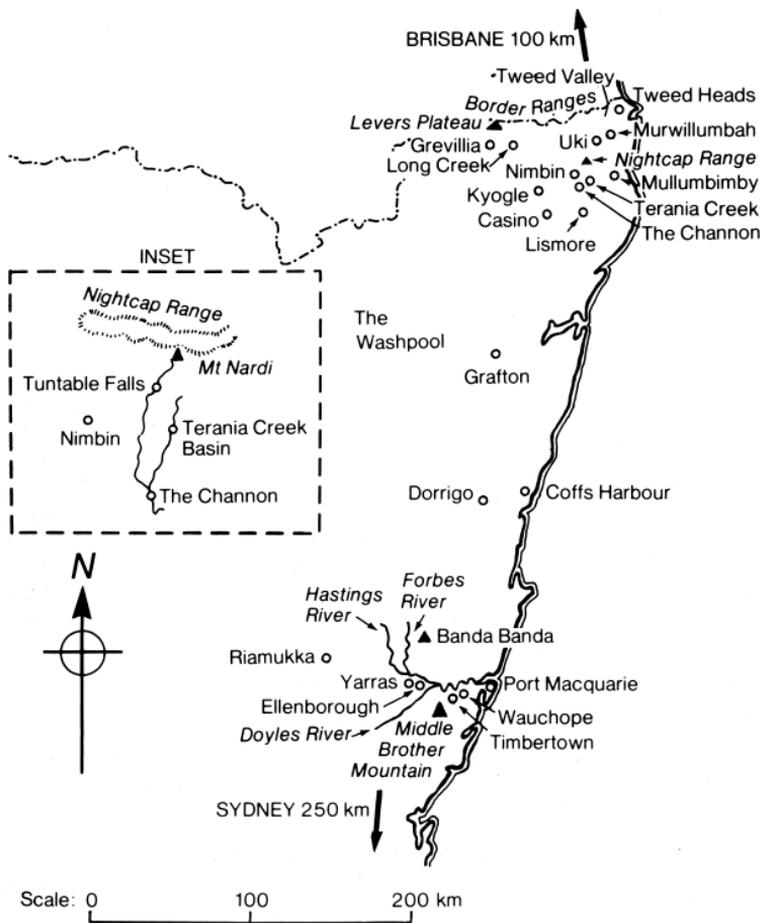
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## Acknowledgements

During the course of writing this book I have benefited greatly from the advice and encouragement of a number of people who have read this work at various stages. I would particularly like to thank: Laurie Aarans, Jill Bowling, Sue Castrique, John Dargavel, Barrie Dyster, Terry Irving, Keven Keeffe, Daphne Nash, Brian Martin, Gregor McLennan, John Merritt, Beverley Pope, Belinda Probert, Basil Schur, Rachel Sharp, Terri Seddon and Tom Williams. The research for this book was made possible by the generosity of the History Department at the Australian National University.

Finally, I would like to warmly thank Therese Quinn for her unflagging enthusiasm for this book and her perceptive reading of the final draft.

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## Introduction: two worlds

I follow the bitumen river that winds slowly up the valley, with each turn taking me higher into the mountainous forests. Pockets of rainforest lie tucked away in the gullies. The road reaches a crest, then drops into the next valley where the forest gives way to pasture. I turn off onto a dirt road, pass through two farm gates and arrive at a fibro house with a rusting tin roof. In the paddocks below a herd of cattle are grazing, while high above the ridge rise the tree clad slopes of the coastal ranges. I have come to visit Neville and Betty Hicks, whose working lives have spanned both the dairy and the timber industries. Neville opens the conversation:

I think it was a disaster for the mill to close. It put about a hundred and fifty people out of work. They've had to roam the countryside ever since to find jobs and there's still quite a few of those people haven't found any jobs. Such as my wife and I.<sup>1</sup>

For the next three hours I listen to the story of their working lives: of the futile struggle to earn a living from a dairy farm; the reluctant move into the ranks of the timber mill workforce; the final retrenchments when the mill closed down. The day before I viewed the remnants of that timber mill. I walked across a concrete slab half the size of a football ground and peered solemnly at the

massive wooden framing, rising like a skeleton of telegraph poles. In its heigh day, nearly 200 people worked at the mill, turning the last of the local coachwood stands into the finest grade marine plywood. As I walked past the slab, my eyes picked out the shapes of old machinery, lying rusting in the grass. The conical silhouette of a sawdust burner loomed above the ruins. Behind the mill, a row of small timbered grey cottages stood in the deep shadows of the lengthening day. Neither painted, nor lined, they provided homes for the mill workers for over thirty years. But by the time I visited, only a few of the huts were still standing. When the mill closed down, three years before, the owners offered the huts to the workers if they could move them away. Only those with nowhere else to go, stayed on.

Inside one of these huts lived Rhonda Myles and her husband Bill; they had been unemployed since the day the mill closed down. Rhonda was bitter about her last two years at the mill:

[The conservationists] come up there and made big speeches about, 'Nobody'll lose their jobs.' That was their main theme cry, 'Nobody will lose their jobs. There'll be a job for everybody.' And that was the laughing part of it all ... up there [at the mill] for the last twelve, eighteen months, you didn't know from one week to the next whether you had a job or whether you didn't, what was happening to you. And it's hard.

But I think the hardest day I put in up there was the day ... [I had] to watch this sixty people walking down the track and knowing that that was it, that they were finished and it only left about ... thirty of us there at that time ... That was really hard. I come home and had a big scream and yell at the old man about it all.





Aerial view of the plymill at Yarras. (Photo by courtesy Winifred Godfrey *The Rise and Fall of Yarras Mill.*)

A week later, I visit another river valley. This time I drive much longer on the dirt and at times the road is almost impassable. The local council has no time for the ‘new settlers’ and doesn’t bother grading the road. This suits the council workers, several of whom are retrenched timber workers. Dodging a mud-filled pothole I turn off the road and follow a rutted track through some thick forest before emerging into bright sunlight. Though set in a clearing—to take in the sun, to capture the view—this house is almost part of the forest. Its main framing is fashioned from tree trunks, with the forks and branches left intact to support the beams. The walls are clad with local timber and even the roof is timber thatched. Behind the house is an orchard: peaches, avocados, mangos, and other expensive and exotic fruits. It’s still several years before they’ll reach full production but the elaborate watering and netting system shows how seriously their owners view their potential.

Waiting to greet me are Sally Johnston and her husband Roger, new settlers in the region who are now in their late thirties. Roger and Sally are horticulturalists and both played a long and active role in the conservation battle to keep the loggers out of their forest basin. We talk for several hours, traversing the history of their lives: the flight from the city in search of a simple life-style in the bush, the early years of eking out a marginal living, the excitement and frustration of fighting for their bit of forest, and the beauty and wonder of living beside the rainforest. As we finish our talk and I prepare to leave, I mention my visit to the mill and talk about some of the timber workers I have met. Sally turns pensive for a few moments, but then replies:

It's funny, I remember when the announcement [to end rainforest logging] was made. I just felt fantastic but I immediately thought of all those blokes that were going to lose their jobs and felt really sad and responsible that I had been part of that. And how could they help feeling bitter and how would I feel if somebody worked their guts out to make me lose my job ... But I just felt this other stuff so strongly and it's so hard to express that to guys like that. It just comes out that you care about this little fern and he's got five kids to feed.

Several hundred miles south, and two years before, Neville Wran, the Premier of NSW, rose to address the ALP state conference. After ten years of conservative rule under a Liberal Government, the early years of the Wran Labor Government had come as a breath of fresh air for many people in the cities. But for Neville Wran, it was one of his policies in the countryside for which he wanted to be remembered: 'When we're all dead and buried and our children's children are reflecting upon what was the best thing the Labor Government did in the 20th century, they'll all come up with the answer that we saved the rainforests'.<sup>2</sup>

A year before, the NSW government had announced the first major halt to rainforest logging on the Australian mainland. All rainforest logging in the state forests of Northern NSW was to cease and a number of additions to existing national parks, as well as the formation of new national parks, were declared. The conservationists, who had campaigned for ten years for this day, were elated: 'Rainforests—a momentous decision ... far-sighted and responsible.'<sup>3</sup> For the timber workers on the north coast, that day in October 1982 was a day of outrage. The bitterness evoked was matched only by their memories of Terania Creek, three years before, when conservationists blockaded the forestry operations and turned a minor land-use conflict into a national media event.

With their siege of the Terania Creek Basin, the rainforest conservationists unleashed a new strategy of non-violent direct action, an approach which was to win national publicity for their Tasmanian colleagues during the 1983 campaign to stop the flooding of the Franklin River. Together with the loss of jobs in the timber industry, these direct-action tactics transformed local disputes over land-use management into major political and social conflicts which have persisted to this day. The acrimony around this conflict, and the gulf which separates the protagonists, has never diminished since the heady days of Terania Creek.

Why?

This book is an attempt to answer that question. Seeking that answer sent me digging in history archives for old minutes and musty letters, and visiting libraries where I thumbed through the journals of conservationists and timber associations. I brushed the dust away from obscure government reports and turned the yellowed pages of old financial newspapers. For many months I worked through these historical materials in search of the key to my puzzle. But it was only when I set out for the north coast



A new phase in Australian environmental politics: the era of direct action blockades. A protester arrested during the Terania Creek blockade, September 1979. (Photo by Darcy McFadden, courtesy Northern Star Ltd. Lismore.)

to talk with timber workers and conservationists that I began to understand the deeper roots of that bitter conflict.

Alongside a local conservationist, I walked through the rainforests at Terania Creek and gazed up at the massive cedar trees, almost eclipsed by strangler figs. Later I ventured into the Border Ranges and into the Washpool wilderness where I marvelled at the delicate fungi growing on the buttresses of forest giants.

On other days I spent my time with timber workers. I watched with trepidation as a logger felled a Flooded Gum then listened closely as he showed me how to sharpen chain saw teeth. I sat on a verandah near a river bank and followed carefully the story unfolding in the pages of the family photo album: grandfather 'the cedar hopper', the hard days of the depression, the flood which swept the mill away. I walked through numerous hardwood sawmills, peering through the thick dust at men and women labouring to turn trees into timber.

But it was the interviews I taped and which I use throughout this book, which really opened my eyes to the different worlds populated by conservationists and timber workers. The impressions I have sketched above were instant in their impact and gave me a strong sense of these disparate worlds. But it was the words of these people, transcribed from my tape recordings, that provided me with a deeper understanding of why the conflict between timber workers and conservationists has been so bitter, and where its wider social origins lie.

As chapter 1 will show, the 1980s cannot be understood without the context of the 1950s and 1960s. It was during those years that the future shape of the New South Wales timber industry was decided. Under the pressure of intense competition, the north coast hardwood mills modernised their equipment. It was the only way they could survive into the 1970s. But it meant the steady retrenchment of workers from the industry and job insecurity for

those that remained. At the same time, large scale pine plantations which had been established in the southern and central tablelands threw out new challenges—both to their competitors in the hardwood industry and to conservationists who despised these vast expanses of radiata pines as ‘ecological wastelands’.

What these economic changes meant for the workers in the industry is explored in chapter 2. Mill modernisations meant the transformation of the traditional sawmill from a family business into a modern corporation. More efficient machinery saw impersonal, ‘mass production’ management methods arrive in what had been essentially a ‘cottage industry’. As part of this process, the more remote sawmills closed or relocated to the major towns and the era of timber villages ended. At the same time, the sun set on the era of the work gang, where workers camped out in the bush while they felled the trees. They were replaced by solitary log fallers with chainsaws and four-wheel drives who ‘commuted’ to work from their homes in the towns. These dramatic changes, both in the mills and in the bush, saw record levels of production achieved in the industry. But for the workers, the benefits were minimal. The low wages, the job insecurity and the hazardous nature of their work changed little over the years. Their union, the New South Wales Timber Workers’ Union, was too weak and poorly resourced to intervene effectively on their behalf.

For many timber workers in the mills and in the bush, their work was their life. ‘Timber in the blood’ was a common expression in many timber communities. As chapter 3 illustrates, from their labouring arose a particular conception of the world, one in which the productive qualities of the forests were paramount and the ethic of hard work was enshrined. Denied the opportunity for formal schooling beyond the age of 14, many timber workers began their real education in the world of work. Here the practical knowledge they attained became their measure for the worth

of any knowledge. On the one hand, this helped them survive the hazards of their industry. On the other hand, it made them contemptuous towards 'book learning', particularly when this was embodied by educated foresters or conservationists.

The chasm between timber workers and conservationists is analysed in chapter 4 where I explore the imagery of nature and the construction of history which developed within timber communities. The imagery of nature which log fallers created in the course of their working day drew upon many of the elements of their labour process: its hard manual work, its danger, and its commercial motivation. At the same time, the kinds of history produced in timber communities reinforced a self-image which minimised the destructive side of their industry. In seeing themselves as *true* conservationists, timber workers and foresters constructed a history which was aimed at repelling the insults of their conservationist adversaries.

In turn, the rainforest conservationists saw nature from within a distinctively middle class world in which the beauty and unique ecology of the rainforests was supreme. As chapter 5 shows, the conservationists' concern for the 'non-productive' values of the forests was only possible because they did not earn their livelihoods there. Similarly, the kinds of history they produced owed much to their formal education. Unlike the timber workers, for whom history was family folklore, for the university-trained conservationists, history was the product of detailed research and writing and was intended as an important weapon in their armoury.

While the conflict over rainforest logging occurred on many fronts, the terrain on which the battle finally settled was an economic one. The issue of mill closures and job losses came to dominate the final stages of the rainforest campaign. However, as chapter 6 highlights, the efforts to marry rainforest conservation with job protection foundered on the shortcomings of the

conservation campaign and the hostility of timber communities.

Chapter 7 asks whether we can expect to see the distance between these two worlds diminish. Since the 1970s, the Terania Creek spectacle has been repeated often. Each time the same animosities have flared, whether it be in north Queensland or southern Tasmania. A resolution to this conflict is not likely, but it is possible to perceive the conditions which would minimise its impact and this book ends by outlining what those conditions are.

In the pages that follow, I quote extensively from the interviews which I conducted on the north coast with over 50 timber workers, foresters, mill managers and conservationists during the mid-1980s. I have given them fictitious names, and have re-arranged some of the geographical and occupational details, to preserve their anonymity but it is their actual words which are used in this book and I am greatly indebted to them for their willingness to share their views.

The underlying theme of this book is that people inhabit cultural worlds (and I use 'culture' in the fullest sense of the word<sup>4</sup>) which are constructed from a great diversity of elements: their working lives, their gender and family relations, their friendships and communities, their local environment, their sports and entertainment. But weaving a single thread through this diverse tapestry, and knotting together many of these elements, are the class relations prevailing in contemporary Australian society. Class relations—the way people relate to economic production—are important in two ways. They are fundamental in shaping people's lived experiences—the substance of those cultural worlds—and they are also crucial in allocating the intellectual resources which people use to make sense of those experiences—to give form to the substance.

In most of the following chapters, I critically contrast two groups of people whose working lives and cultural worlds seem a

universe apart. The timber workers belong to the manual working class: whether labouring in the forests or the sawmills they rely on their bodies to earn their living. When those bodies lose their strength, or become crippled or maimed, their working lives may suddenly end. The poor rewards and the harsh conditions of manual labouring stand out in stark relief against the working world of the middle-class intellectual. Usually office-bound, these professional workers bring to their tasks not their bodies but their minds. Their specialised knowledge and technocratic skills win for the middle-class worker considerable autonomy and privileges within the workplace and a comfortable standard of living at home. Despite this acute contrast, both these groups of people are still 'working class' in the broad sense of the word.<sup>5</sup> I do not accept the view that the middle class is a distinctively new class but prefer to regard them as a 'fraction' of the working class. A more detailed discussion of this issue is offered in chapter 7. For ease of expression, however, I will retain the conventional terms 'working class' when I refer to manual workers and 'middle class' when I allude to professional/intellectual workers.

In presenting an interpretation of timber workers and conservationists which is based on class analysis, I do not seek to obscure other significant differences between these two groups of people. In some cases these other differences transcend class relations—the important division between the city and the countryside being a case in point. At other times, these differences develop in tandem with class relations—the different kinds of masculinity which come into opposition when manual workers interact with middle-class intellectuals reflect this tendency.

This book gives a greater voice to these manual workers than to their middle-class adversaries. This has been deliberate and reflects my concern to focus on the timber industry and to present the world of the timber workers as fully as limited space

permits. The world of middle-class intellectuals is already well understood, particularly to readers of books. The emphasis in the chapters which deal with the conservationists is to highlight the important ways in which their lives and their concerns departed significantly from those of the timber workers. I do not offer a history of their conservation battle; rather, I reflect on what their years of campaigning meant in terms of class and culture.

## CHAPTER I

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### The timber industry: historical background

Before the European invasion the forests of northern New South Wales spread in a carpet of thick green from the ocean to the tablelands. The early cedar getters, in search of ‘red gold’, opened the way to white settlement. In the words of one nineteenth century writer: ‘The timber getters are no doubt the pioneers of civilisation. They are the first to brave the dangers of these wilds, to penetrate the recesses of the forests and to find out the excellence of the land’.<sup>1</sup> But this writer also remarked on the devastation that accompanied their wasteful cutting:

The devastating axe of the timber-getter has made dire havoc amongst the cedar brushes and where a few years ago immense quantities of the wood were to be found there is not now a single tree worth cutting ... They destroy young trees too, with the most culpable carelessness, and ... care not a button how many young trees they destroy in cutting down an old one.<sup>2</sup>

Other contemporaries were less confident about equating the timber getters with civilisation. The cedar getters were notorious for their ‘hard working, hard drinking, hard swearing’<sup>3</sup> lives and another nineteenth century correspondent noted: ‘Gradually the

cedar getter and his immorality had to give place to agriculture and the civilising influence of a home-loving population.<sup>4</sup> But this 'home-loving population', the farmers who followed in the wake of the timber getters, cleared the river valleys in a manner more devastating than that of the cedar getters. Following a tradition of European agriculture, nearly all the tree cover was removed, even when there was no use for the timber that was felled. Many trees were simply ring barked and then burned, so intent were the farmers on converting the land to agriculture.

A gang of men would get together and fell the softwood timber by axe and saw. Hardwood timber was ringbarked ... After several months ... the men would combine to light the timber on a wide front. The fires were a sight to see. Flames leaping many feet into the air and roaring like a tornado through the dry timber ... Millions of feet of beautiful timber ... beech, cedar, coachwood and ash ... tallow wood, blackbutt and brush box - were destroyed, but this was the price of progress.<sup>5</sup>

The forests in the steeper gullies and in the mountainous hinterland held out longer. It was not until World War II, with its ferocious appetite for local raw materials, that these forests felt the bite of axe and saw. As with the cedar getters, the wastage of the war years and the following post-war years became notorious. But it was a later generation of timber workers who came to bear the brunt of public outrage over the destruction of valuable forests for short-term gain. In this chapter I concentrate on this post-war generation of timber workers and explore the major industry changes which took place during the 1960s and had such a major impact on events in the 1970s and 1980s.

## The mill modernisations

Primitive technology opened the coastal forests of northern New South Wales. To the natural sounds of the bush were added ‘the ring of the axe, the monotonous zip of the cross-cut saw, the crack of the bullock whip and the colourful language of the bullocky.’<sup>6</sup> The earliest sawmills were steam or water-driven and were usually located on the banks of rivers from where loads of timber were shipped to Sydney, Newcastle and overseas. As log supplies from the nearby forests dwindled, tramways were used to bring in timber from the more remote stands. Other feats of technical ingenuity, such as elaborate flying foxes, were also used to recover logs from the steeper terrain.

The 1930s saw the beginnings of motorised transport in the bush. Jock Wright, a small-scale sawmiller near Kyogle, is now in his seventies and has worked in timber all his life. For him, the coming of motor vehicles changed the timber industry dramatically:

I can recall they had a little Ford truck there and oh well, we thought it was really something. You know, after seeing bullockies take three days to travel ten mile in with a load and return again ... I can remember [a young fellow] having two logs on this lorry and in one of the gullies ... he rolled the truck over ... And there was 1800 super feet in the two logs. Well, we'd nearly cart that with the Toyota today.

And I remember the old chap like, their father ... really going for this young fellow that was driving the truck. He said, 'I told you before. You overload. You been overloading that truck' and so forth. And this 1800 super feet ... it'd be a laugh today ... thinking it was overloaded ...

With World War II came a massive demand for locally grown timber, and trucks and tractors played a major role in opening up virgin forest areas. The coachwood stands of the north coast forests were highly favoured for rifle butts and aircraft. After the war, timber imports were slow to resume and the urgency of post-war reconstruction accelerated the already high rate of logging. The production of timber from native forests expanded dramatically over this period, rising from 271 million super feet in 1937–8 to 446 million super feet in 1946–7, and reaching a record peak of 601 million super feet in 1951–2.<sup>7</sup> The costs to the forests of the war were considerable. In the words of one north coast sawmiller:

the rainforests were slaughtered; and so was a great deal of young Blackbutt. There is no doubt that it devastated the forests and wiped out producing areas that are taking many years to regenerate; but meeting the demands for timber was seen as a patriotic duty and the timber industry's contribution to the war effort.<sup>8</sup>

In the late 1950s chainsaws appeared in the forests. At first they were cumbersome two-person machines, intended mainly for cutting fallen logs to length. But soon lightweight single-person chainsaws arrived and were readily drafted into felling trees. The results were startling. Mike O'Farrell, a log faller who started his working life in the late 1950s, recalled:

I can fall more today with one chain saw and myself than four fellows could with a cross cut and an axe ... In the [early sixties] I was cutting more on my own than the other three fellows put together so gradually they got out of it.

The tractors, the trucks and the chainsaws did far more than change the life of the workers in the forests. They had a major social and economic impact on the north coast. Traditionally, sawmills had usually been established adjacent to their forest resource. Once

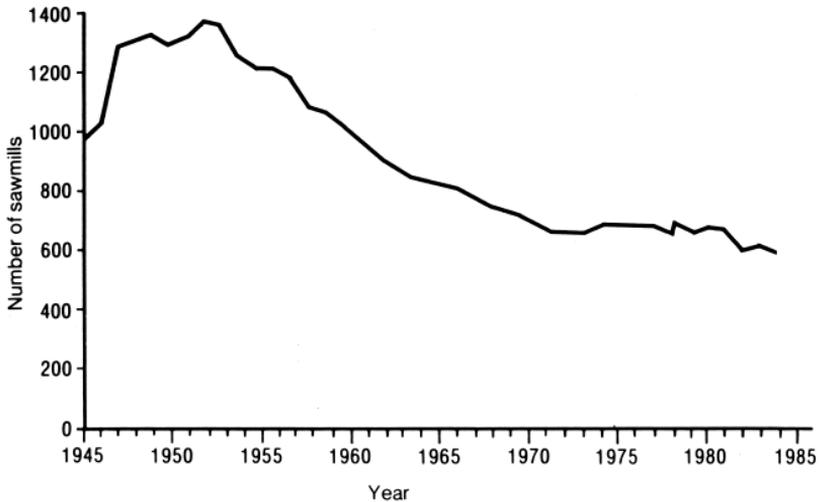
the timber was cut out, the sawmill and its small village would move on to another patch of forest. In the 1950s and 1960s, with large trucks in wider use, the sawmills moved into the towns, where they could more easily find labour and make use of electricity to modernise their equipment. For the sawmillers, there were large rewards in modernising their mills: they could cut their labour force by a half to a third and still increase their output by as much as fivefold.

From the mid-1950s onwards, the number of sawmills operating in New South Wales steadily declined while the output from the larger mills continued to increase. Many mills closures reflected the end of a natural life cycle: there were numerous small bush sawmills which had sprung to life to cash in on the severe post war-timber shortage and had then depleted their supplies or been squeezed out by tighter market conditions. However, a more significant trend during the 1960s was the amalgamation of small and medium sized sawmills into larger more productive mills. By the mid-1970s there were only about half as many mills as there had been in the mid-1950s (see Figure 1.1), but they were milling over 12 per cent more timber than had been cut in the 1950s.<sup>9</sup>

From the forests the logs were carted to the mills where they were processed to various stages. Most often they would be simply cut into flitches (planks) and then cut to thickness and length according to the orders being filled. In some of the more modern mills, the logs would be cut, dried, planed and even shaped. From the mills, the timber entered the market, either directly or through a timber merchant.

The marketing of timber in New South Wales exemplified the anarchy of the capitalist marketplace. Both cyclical and structural instability plagued the industry. Cyclical crises developed because the demand for timber products hinged on the fate of the housing industry, itself highly vulnerable to trade cycles and gov-

Figure 1.1: Number of sawmills: NSW 1945–1985



Source: New South Wales Forestry Commission Annual Reports 1945–1985

ernment economic policies. In the early 1950s a minor recession coupled with increased timber imports induced a slump in the timber industry which did not fully ease until the late 1950s. The 1960s began with the disastrous Menzies ‘credit squeeze’. Timber production dropped by nearly 20 per cent and one quarter of timber workers were either dismissed or forced to work short-time. By the mid-1960s the industry had recovered and was enjoying buoyant conditions. The late 1960s and early 1970s were a period of growth and prosperity but this proved short lived. By the mid-1970s the domestic effects of the world recession, coupled with high interest rates, induced the worst slump in the industry since the early 1960s and over a thousand workers lost their jobs. The 1980s began with a brief revival but the onset of a national recession in 1982 plunged the industry back into a slump.<sup>10</sup>

The cyclical instability in housing and in the demand for timber was only one dimension of the timber industry's troubles. A longer term structural crisis was developing throughout the 1960s as timber increasingly lost its traditional dominance as a building material to its non-wood rivals such as steel, aluminium and concrete. The native hardwood sawmills faced added competition because the Sydney building industry traditionally relied on North American softwoods. During the 1960s this foreign competition intensified when imports of New Zealand plantation softwoods increased after the signing of the New Zealand - Australia Free Trade Agreement. By the 1970s, import competition from Asia had also increased in the hardwood, plywood and furniture markets.<sup>11</sup>

From the 1930s to the 1960s this import trade was under the control of a powerful marketing cartel set up by the Sydney timber merchants.<sup>12</sup> They ultimately came to control over 80 per cent of softwood imports and successfully fixed prices and restricted supplies when it suited them. However, they failed to extend this control to the native hardwood industry. The Sydney merchants directly controlled over 30 per cent of the New South Wales sawmills but they could not fix prices because there were far too many small independent producers who could flood the market and keep prices down. The Associated Country Sawmillers (ACS: the sawmillers' industry association) was dominated by the larger sawmills and issued price lists in an attempt to foster 'orderly marketing'. However, the recommended prices were constantly flouted because the small producers engaged in price cutting to clear their stocks during industry slumps.

Essentially, the hardwood timber industry was plagued by chronic price cutting. In 1967 the New South Wales government set up a major timber inquiry to assess the long-term prospects for the industry. The inquiry repeatedly heard complaints from the sawmillers that price competition undermined the maintenance

of a 'stable price structure', by which they meant, price levels conducive to high profits. Large sawmills, with their higher overheads, were particularly disadvantaged when the small sawmills dumped their excess stocks on a depressed market.

In the eyes of the Forestry Commission, industry associations, and the large sawmillers, higher returns in the timber industry could only come from increasing productivity through economies of scale and from producing value-added products, both of which required large investments in modern technology. Yet the highly competitive industry structure eroded the profit levels needed for that investment. As one industry spokesperson argued:

... the sawmilling industry is very much in the past. We are using equipment which we were using twenty years ago and it is uneconomic at the present time ... Our biggest problem with modernizing plant is that we have not been able to accumulate a big enough profit margin to do so.<sup>13</sup>

The smaller sawmills were particularly vulnerable to this dilemma. Low profits made it difficult for them to either accumulate capital or raise investment funds to modernise their production. For those sawmills which were operating on a commercially viable scale and had guaranteed Forestry Commission log supplies (called 'crown' quotas), local credit was usually available. But where sawmillers were small-scale operators or dependent on private property log supplies, then local credit was much more capricious. Jock Wright, always a small-scale sawmiller, learnt the bitter lesson:

As I got on my feet I upgraded and that. Each stage I sorta put in a really good carriage ... but it was nearly another downfall too ... He said, the very words he said, 'Jock', he said, 'while ever you can supply timber the quality you're supplying, the railways will always need timber'. And he said, 'There'll always be a market there for it'.

And course, I took heart in that and went ahead and ordered the plant. And I'd already gone to the bank to see if I could organise finance and that was OK, like ... and in the meantime another recession had sorta hit. They had a new chap in charge of the railways in Sydney which turned the screws on ... the swing saws come into vogue and a few of them started ... So the railway found that they could get sufficient sleepers from these chaps with the swing saw and still only paying hewn price because they were only cutting them in the bush ... and I was left with only a scant lot of orders.

But the machine, I'd already had it installed, the Canadian and that, and I went up to the bank. I told them I had the machine in. 'Oh,' they said, 'Why didn't you come and see us. Things has altered to when you come and saw me about things.' You know, they flatly refused to finance it. And I was left owing about three thousand pounds like ... And well I didn't know what way to turn.

It wasn't just low prices which stalled the industry's modernisation. There was a growing crisis in the supply of timber. Not only was the log supply dispersed amongst a large number of small producers, but there were fears that the total log supply was inadequate. Log supplies from private property had steadily declined in the two decades following World War II, dropping from supplying half the cut to less than a third. Consequently, sawmillers were becoming increasingly reliant on timber from State Forests. However, during this period the Forestry Commission changed its method of allocating log supplies. Where previously sawmillers were allocated an area of State Forest from which they could draw their log supplies, from the mid-1950s onwards the Forestry Commission began to allocate log supplies measured by volume. Sawmillers now found themselves issued with an annual quota based on a set volume of timber which could be logged.

This was calculated from the average of the mill's previous log intake. While this was beneficial for forest management because it gave the foresters more flexibility in selecting which areas to log, for the sawmillers it presented a major problem. If their business expanded, the sawmillers found their production constrained by a fixed quota of log supplies.<sup>14</sup>

The fear that the native forests were running out of timber had been voiced well before the war. The Empire Forestry Conference held in Canberra in 1928 heard that the supply of native timbers was inadequate to the state's needs.<sup>15</sup> But in the mid-1960s, with the industry suffering strong competition from its non-wood rivals, the issue of log supply took on a new urgency and further predictions of disaster were aired. For the large sawmills, the risk of inadequate log supplies seriously affected their long term investment planning. At the 1967 Timber Inquiry sawmillers argued forcefully for 'security of tenure':

We cannot plan ahead. We must plan not six weeks or six months, but years ahead. If we are put in this sort of position, the business will go downhill. The bankers laugh if you ask for money to develop the business. They ask, 'What guarantee have we that we will be paid? You may not have this parcel tomorrow'.<sup>16</sup>

Some large corporate sawmills responded to this predicament by buying large private forest holdings but the strategy favoured by most sawmillers intent on modernisation was to buy up the log quotas of the smaller sawmills or amalgamate with them. Consequently, a pattern of sawmill 'cannibalism' took place along the north coast, as the better placed sawmills bought out their neighbours. The purchasers paid prices well above the value of the mill's machinery and other assets in order to obtain their crown log quotas.<sup>17</sup> They then closed down the mills and sold off the equipment.

For many of the mills, it was a case of buy or be bought up. Paul Ryecroft, a successful Grafton sawmiller of the 1980s, recalled the decisive days of the 1960s:

We'd taken a real big step ... We didn't have enough wood ... What we did we bought six other little mills. We bought their quotas. That was where we spent the money. We could see that there wasn't the private property around.

Why did they decide to sell? [*Interviewer*]

Well, they could see that they weren't efficient. They didn't want to spend the big money. They didn't have the quotas. They could see that if they wanted to exist they would have to buy other mills and automate to stay in the game. So they decided to sell out.

By the mid-1970s this process of amalgamating mills and modernising their production had reached a plateau. The world recession pushed most sawmills towards labour-saving investment strategies (such as improved log-handling facilities) while the larger sawmills increasingly diversified their investments and in many cases disinvested from the north coast hardwood industry.<sup>18</sup> This continued into the 1980s as some of the corporate mills shifted their long-range investments away from their hardwood mills and into other wood-related ventures, such as softwood mills or the importing and marketing of timber and hardware. Interstate firms closed down their north coast mills, sold off their equipment, and concentrated their milling activities in their home states.<sup>19</sup> By the mid-1980s, as a result of these industry changes, two main corporate groups—Adelaide Steamship and Boral— owned nearly all the major large-scale sawmills on the north coast.

The large north coast sawmills had finally entered the modern age of highly efficient hardwood milling only to find that 'integrated forest products'—that is, using every scrap of cellulose

from the forests—was now the way of the future. But these north coast mills were poorly placed to take up this challenge. Their log supplies were too scattered and their mill production was still too small to make the new approach economical. Instead, integrated forest production emerged amongst the large timber mills that were based in the extensive softwood plantations in the central and southern tablelands of the state.<sup>20</sup>

## **The pine plantations**

This economic transition in the timber industry was not readily apparent to the public. What was visible, however, was the shift to exotic softwood plantations, mainly radiata pines. Throughout the southern and central tablelands of the state, pine plantations mushroomed from the 1950s onwards, bringing new employment opportunities to small towns and new kinds of timber products into common usage. Whereas in the early 1950s, there had been nearly twenty times as many hardwood sawlogs milled as there had been exotic softwoods, by the early 1980s the proportion was only three to one. At the same time, particle board, produced from pine plantation thinnings, overwhelmingly displaced plywood sheets and flooring boards from their previous dominance in the furniture and construction industries. Radiata pine was favoured for plantations because it grew so rapidly and produced ten times as much timber per hectare as did the native forests.<sup>21</sup>

Native hardwood timbers are physically diverse and their commercial value has varied historically. Timber species considered unmarketable in the 1930s were prized by the 1980s; timber grades or lengths considered worthless in the 1950s were in widespread use by the 1980s.<sup>22</sup> In 1937 brushbox was regarded as ‘almost useless’; 35 years later laminated brushbox adorned the floors and walls of the Sydney Opera House.<sup>23</sup> By the 1970s and 1980s new

technologies had been found for sawing smaller diameter logs and for joining shorter lengths of timber while new techniques were developed for peeling eucalypt veneers and using rainforest timbers for framing.<sup>24</sup>

But all these developments hinged on treating hardwoods as a value-added timber product, a strategy which was only feasible for large mills prepared to invest in modern technology. For the smaller mills, hardwoods remained 'green' timber, suitable mainly as a low-grade general purpose timber (for use in building, pallets, fencing and cases). And in most of these markets, locally produced pine products, imported softwoods and other materials like concrete and steel had a major competitive edge over their hardwood rival. In the building trade, for example, carpenters preferred softwoods like oregon because they were much easier to work with. They 'could assemble the house in half the time—a softer wood to cut and it cuts truer.'<sup>25</sup>

Consequently, the more traditional producers in the hardwood industry faced bleak prospects in the long term. The future belonged to the industries based on the pine plantations.<sup>26</sup> During the 1967 Timber Inquiry, one sawmiller offered this illuminating insight into the shortcomings of his product: '[Hardwood timber] is not a product you can melt down, put on to a conveyor belt, cast, and so on. Hardwood sawmilling requires close, personal attention and individual treatment.'<sup>27</sup>

During the 1960s and 1970s the timber industry had found a timber product that could be cast on a conveyor belt: the produce from the pine plantations. These plantations offered sawmills nearly all the requirements which a transition from cottage industry to modern mass production required. The north coast timber stood in mountainous terrain, drenched by heavy rain for half the year; in the southern and central tablelands the land was undulating and the climate dry. The hardwood forests contained trees of mixed

species, uneven age and vastly different quality whereas the pine plantations offered trees of single species, even age, and predictable quality. Where the forest resources of the north coast were scattered over hundreds of miles, with extraction and transport both costly, the pine plantations were tightly centralised near the mills and were able to use modern harvesting machinery and short-distance transport.

Historically, the hardwood timber industry on the north coast had simply located itself amidst an existing resource. Governments had traditionally intervened to protect that resource: to hold back the farmers from extensive clearing and to rein in the sawmillers from over-cutting. But the pine plantation industry was actually brought into being by the government. Thus the economic transition from native hardwood forests to pine plantations was also a important political development in the relationship between industry and government.

Timber takes a long time to grow. At best hardwood sawlogs can be produced in 80 years while large softwood sawlogs like radiata pine take about 40 years. Time scales of this order are prohibitive to sawmillers because the capital debt in establishing plantations becomes astronomical as the time period increases. Only the largest corporations were prepared for such costs. Thus pulp and paper monopolies alone were prepared to establish private plantations in New South Wales. The majority of producers, including the large particle board manufacturers, were content to leave the growing of their resource to government.

Governments were prepared to provide the industry with its timber needs for several reasons. The timber industry was a major decentralised industry: politicians were fond of citing the number of jobs created in country areas by logging and milling the forests.<sup>28</sup> The timber industry was crucial for the building industry. Despite its competitive decline against other building

materials, timber was still the staple home-building product and governments were always sensitive to the health of the building industry. Finally, the cost of timber imports severely affected the balance of trade. From the post-war period onward, timber was the second most costly drain on foreign expenditure for the country.<sup>29</sup>

The NSW Forestry Commission had experimented with softwood plantations before World War II, but doubts about their viability, followed by the disruption of the war, meant that it was not until the 1950s that a major softwood plantation program got underway. In the mid-1960s the federal government assisted and gave considerable funds to the state forest services to increase their rate of planting. In NSW the rate of planting leapt dramatically as the Forestry Commission set itself the target of a million acres (400,000 hectares) by the year 2000. Native forests were cleared to provide the land for the new plantations and the earliest conservation 'forestry battles' erupted as a result. Conservationists were stirred to action by fears that 'biological deserts' were replacing the rich diversity of the 'native heritage'. The Colong Committee (one of the main groups later involved in the rainforest campaign) won an important victory in the early 1970s when it stopped the widespread planting of radiata pine on the Boyd Plateau in the south western Blue Mountains. These early forestry campaigns were crucial in drawing up the terms of the debate for most of the later conservation battles. For the conservationists, the pine plantations represented the indiscriminate clearfelling of native forests and their replacement by monocultural tree crops. From an economic standpoint, the plantations were criticised as a disastrous over-reaction to an exaggerated shortage of softwoods and a disgraceful public subsidy to private industries. Finally, the Forestry Commission was branded as a 'captured bureaucracy', a government agency which had failed to regulate the industry it had been set up to monitor and had instead become its compliant servant.

All these criticisms were forcefully presented in *The Fight For the Forests*, a seminal study of Australian forestry by two environmental philosophers Val and Richard Routley.<sup>30</sup> The reaction by the forestry establishment to these attacks was swift and heated. Academic and professional foresters alike rallied to the defence of the Forestry Commission and for the remainder of the 1970s and 1980s, the Commission adopted a siege mentality in most of its dealings with its outside critics.

The dramatic expansion of pine plantations during the 1960s was instrumental in galvanising the shape of conservation politics for the next two decades. Their establishment was also crucial for the fate of the north coast hardwood industry. Because of their low profitability, the larger sawmills in the hardwood industry moved determinedly toward industry restructuring, particularly mill modernisations and amalgamations. The result was the retrenchment of timber workers. Those sawmill companies which chose to disinvest in favour of softwood production also closed mills or reduced production. Again, the result was more retrenchments. This process of economic restructuring was not without its social and political costs. As the following overview of the New South Forestry Commission shows, governments and state bureaucracies were caught within a web of contradictions in their dealings with the timber industry.

## **The Forestry Commission**

From its inception, the Forestry Commission was charged with a double role: providing timber for the immediate needs of the economy and conserving timber resources for the future. For much of the early part of the century, these tasks were complementary because the enemy was a common one: the farmers who cleared native forests for agriculture. The Forestry Commission inherited

a forest estate greatly depleted by previous land uses. As a Royal Commission in 1908 concluded: 'The protection of the forest domain appears to have been nearly always subordinated to the policy of settlement.'<sup>31</sup> The task for the Forestry Commission from 1916 onward was to consolidate the forests within reserves which could be managed for future production needs, rather than squandered for immediate greed or wasted by the clearing activities of pastoralists and farmers.

By the 1920s the majority of the current forest reserves in New South Wales had been set aside for forestry management and a tentative plantation softwood program was underway. As noted earlier, the pine plantations expanded dramatically during the 1960s and 1970s. At the same time, the native forests, which covered an area some thirty times as great, took on the role of poor cousin. An increasingly smaller proportion of the Forestry Commission budget was channelled into regenerating and treating the native forests (see Figure 1.2). As the 1967 Timber Inquiry reluctantly conceded: 'With present and foreseeable future finance, the Forestry Commission is unable to treat all the areas needing treatment after logging'.<sup>32</sup>

For the foresters in the field, the Forestry Commission priorities were obvious. Colin Greeves, a retired north coast forester, reflected on that process:

Now with the limited amount of money that was coming, it was all going to the pine plantations to the detriment of the north coast ... With hindsight, it meant that they weren't looking at the social impact of what they were doing. They were looking at the pure economics of forestry. That was the deficiency ... In doing that it meant that the north coast and other areas were the losers ...

How did that affect you, working in the field up here?

[Interviewer]

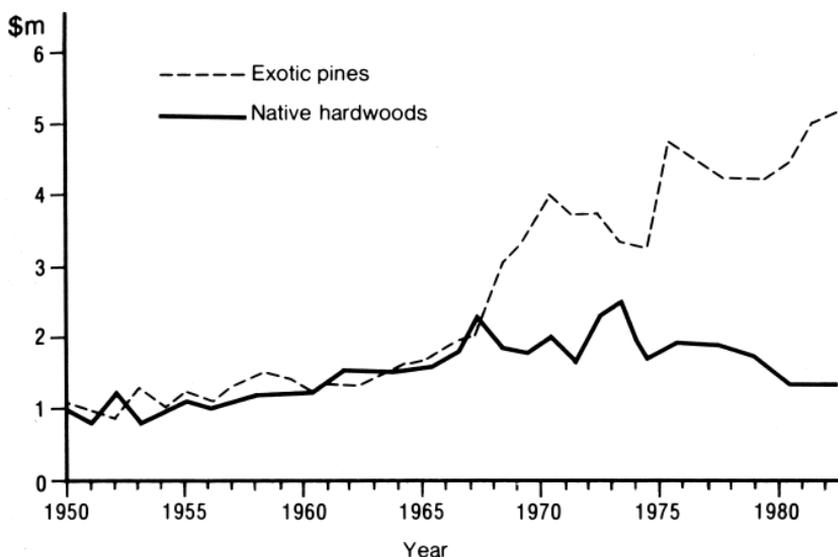
It made it very hard for us. We were battling for money all the time. There were things that we thought we should have been doing, we know we should have been doing, but we weren't getting the funds to do it. Whereas with the pine plantations, it was almost carte blanche for the foresters in the pine plantations because the money was there for them ...

The top officers in the Forestry Commission were aware of these costs, but saw the Commission's strategy as the only way of bridging the impending shortage of domestic timber supplies. For the virgin mountainous forests the policy was to 'cut out and get out' while in the coastal regrowth forests the Commission aimed to maximise annual tree growth so they could provide the best sawlogs in the shortest possible time. By the mid-1970s the Forestry Commission admitted it was prepared to intensively log the mountainous hardwood forests, but not to bear the costs for their full regeneration:

The more mountainous and less accessible forests behind the coastal plain should be logged for sawlogs to the limit of economic accessibility ... Regeneration should be obtained by natural methods, generally without the assistance of any silvicultural treatment ... The essential feature of post-logging management of these areas is to obtain an acceptable forest cover preferably of commercial quality. Where this would require additional investment, any forest cover should be accepted as an alternative.<sup>33</sup>

The Forestry Commission was in a bind. Even had it wished to do more for the native forests, it lacked the finances. From the 1940s onwards, the Forestry Commission had rarely covered its expenditure with its own revenue but the difference had generally stayed within 10 per cent to 15 per cent. But by the mid-1960s its revenue was barely covering half its expenditure and this deficit

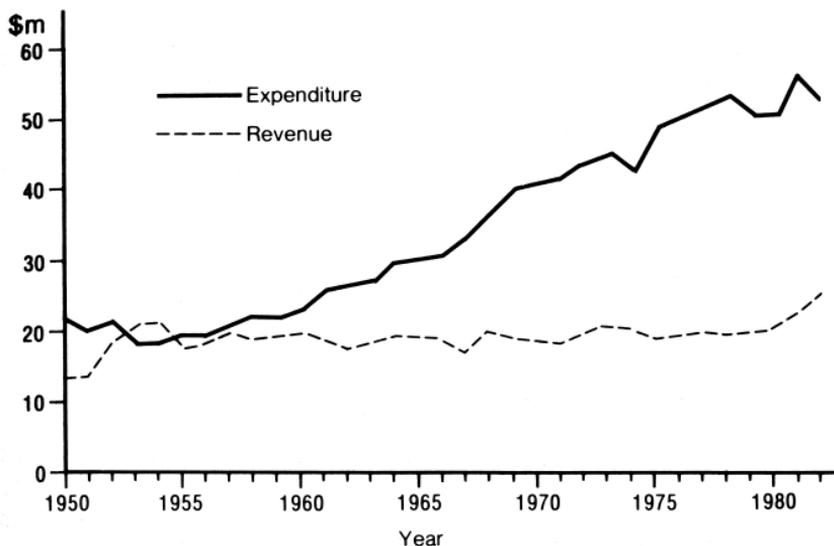
Figure 1.2: NSW Forestry Commission expenditure on forest treatment 1950–1982



Note: The figures are expressed in dollars in constant values with a base of 100 in 1980–81. The sudden rise in expenditure on native forests in 1973 was largely due to an infusion of \$300,000 in federal Unemployment Relief funds.

Source: Based on figures from 'Finances'. New South Wales Forestry Commission Annual Reports 1950–1982

Figure 1.3: NSW Forestry Commission finances 1950–1982



Note: The figures are expressed in dollars in constant values with a base of 100 in 1980–81.

Source: Based on figures from 'Finances'. New South Wales Forestry Commission Annual Reports 1950–1982

worsened in the 1970s (see Figure 1.3). The predicament stemmed from the fact that the bulk of its revenue came from royalties on hardwood logs (around 60 per cent) whilst most of its expenditure went on roading the native forests and establishing and treating the softwood plantations. In the short term, the Forestry Commission's revenue was linked to a resource that was steadily declining while a good deal of its expenditure was infrastructural, and the financial returns from this were still decades away.

The best way to rein in the deficit was to increase the Forestry Commission's royalty income from the hardwood forests. Since 1937 the Forestry Commission had used a stumpage appraisal system to calculate that royalty. This system used the market price

of the sawn timber as its starting point, and then deducted the various costs of production, such as harvesting, transporting, milling and marketing, to arrive at final figure. This 'residual' became the Forestry Commission's royalty income. The stumpage appraisal system was introduced to ensure that 'sawmillers operating at a considerable distance from their markets, or sawmillers operating on poorer quality logs, to be at no disadvantage when selling sawn timber in the major market places'.<sup>34</sup>

Such a system meant that the Forestry Commission was constrained from raising its income because it only kept the residual of a price set elsewhere. As one south coast forester noted: 'The appraisal system is one reason why the Forestry Commission hasn't been able to put the amount of money into forest development that it would like. Because the value hasn't been put on the timber in the first place'.<sup>35</sup> However, under pressure from Treasury to achieve 'budget equilibrium', the Forestry Commission began to force higher royalty payments from the sawmillers during the 1960s. Timber industry spokespeople reacted angrily: 'A decentralised Industry has virtually stagnated—because it has been denied its birthright to trade profitably at wholesale rates.'<sup>36</sup>

Fortunately for the sawmillers, a Liberal–Country Party government regained office in the mid-1960s and the timber industry found itself with influence again. As one industry official put it, 'the Government has sympathetically responded to the Industry's appeals against stumpage increases'.<sup>37</sup> The new government initiated an inquiry into the timber industry (the 1967 Timber Inquiry mentioned earlier) and also strongly resisted Forestry Commission demands for higher royalty rates. At a meeting of sawmillers, the Premier, Robin Askin, was warmly received when he outlined the government's position:

Last year it was suggested by the Commission and the Minister that timber royalties should be increased to bridge

at least part of this gap in finances ... You will be glad to know that the Government has no intention of increasing royalties in the immediate future. How long we will be able to hold this line and still continue to provide the wherewithal to develop State Forests ... remains to be seen. But we will do our best. [There was a great thunder of applause at this point].<sup>38</sup>

As well as royalty payments, the other issue which most sorely tested the relationship between the Forestry Commission and the timber industry was the problem of log supplies. Not only did the timber industry face a declining resource, it also faced a changing resource. With primitive technology at their service, the early log fallers had taken only the best logs from the forest. With the arrival of chainsaws it became economic to fall a much greater range of trees. This meant that the quality of the timber began to decline as smaller diameter logs and logs with greater defects began to proliferate in the mill yards. This dilemma for the sawmiller was made worse by a particular approach to forest harvesting adopted by the Forestry Commission. From a forestry management perspective it was important that systematic logging of the forests took place. The Forestry Commission was not content to see the sawmills take only the best trees and leave the forests increasingly degraded. To pressure the sawmills to comply with their management policies the Forestry Commission reduced royalties for defective logs and introduced 'tree marking', to make the loggers fall the poorer trees.

In the long term, however, for the Forestry Commission and for the large sawmillers, the rapid demise of the small sawmiller was the answer to their problems. The departure of the small mills would help restore profit levels and also relieve the pressures on the limited log supplies. The small sawmillers did not share this vision of the future. They used the 1967 Timber Inquiry as a forum in

which to argue that their operations were as economical, if not more so, than their larger rivals.<sup>39</sup> They stressed their low cost structures and versatility in dealing with the changing resource. The local shire councillors supported their case, knowing that many of the modernised mills used only half to a third of the former workforce:

The small sawmill in areas such as ours has been the life-blood of the industry and the town grows as a result: the sawmillers involved in the small mills know best when their mills are operating at a loss and the absorption by the big monopolistic enterprise results in a loss of labour forces and the departure of timber workers for the City. Contrary to what may be believed the displaced employee in the small mill is not absorbed by the big mill established in the area.<sup>40</sup>

The irony of industry restructuring was that ‘decentralisation’ had long been the rallying cry of Forestry Commission officers, sawmillers and country politicians. The industry was seen to have an ‘historic role as a decentralising influence’.<sup>41</sup> Yet the mill amalgamations and modernisations produced rural unemployment in the short term. In the long term, the new pine plantation-based industries did offer increased and stable rural employment—but the pine plantations were in a different corner of the state. For the north coast, the timber industry’s restructuring endangered the rhetoric of ‘decentralisation’: ‘If we could have fewer and larger hardwood mills it would be easier for the companies concerned to install better machinery but would bring the political and social problem of closing industries on which many small rural communities depend’.<sup>42</sup>

The Forestry Commission officers were closely tied into the fate of these rural communities and faced numerous pressures which were often at odds with sound forest management practices. Sometimes the pressure was direct, such as when a sawmiller

approached a local politician to influence the Forestry Commission. More often the broader political consequences of management policies were the problem: “There is a mill and a little village there, and from a forestry point of view we should say, “You should close, we are overcutting” or “Your through-put should be reduced substantially”. I am afraid our hearts have ruled our heads and we say “We will continue to supply what you have been getting.”<sup>43</sup>

For the 1967 Committee of Inquiry the ‘Bulahdelah crisis’ came to symbolise this generalised predicament of the north coast timber towns: twelve mills faced only two to three more years of life. A senior forester who visited the town later reported his findings to the Inquiry: ‘The only feeling I have from talking to the millers is that it is difficult to get the message to them that the life is short. It was very difficult to make them appreciate that that situation was here ...’<sup>44</sup>

This forester had proposed three options to the local sawmillers. They could do nothing and see all the mills close; they could amalgamate several mills into one; or, they could establish mobile mills out in the forests. But the obstinacy of the millers left him stumped:

I asked them how they would feel if we closed half the mills down and the rest carried on; something had to be done if the township was not to die. There were objections to that—some were quite vociferous about closing mills, even though they could not offer alternatives and yet could be faced with a very short life ... I have this impression: they are hoping somehow for a miracle.<sup>45</sup>

The large corporate sawmills had no doubt what the answer should be. Lindsay Chapman, the managing director of Allen Taylors—the largest chain of sawmills in New South Wales—outlined his proposals:

The sensible thing to do in this area would be to build one single central plant, or possibly two, and divert all the log supplies to this. My suggestion to the meeting of millers was that this could be done on a co-operative basis. I said that my company would co-operate if the millers were prepared to do this. The difficulty here is that these millers have been operating up there on their own as individuals for a long time. The remaining value of their existing sawmills is very small. You are asking a man to give up his independence as an operator and virtually his own power of making decisions about what he will do, and this is a pretty hard decision for people like this to make.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

During the years of the Liberal-Country Party Coalition, the north coast had a far stronger political voice than it did under the Wran Labor Government of the 1970s. The Labor Party had increasingly cultivated the votes of the urban middle class and could afford to ignore many rural electorates. In the 1960s, ‘clientalism’—defined as ‘the exchange of political support in return for the allocation of politically-mediated resources’<sup>47</sup>—had dominated the State political arena. This was exemplified in the close links between the timber industry and the Askin Government.

However, with the onset of the world recession in the mid-1970s a Labor Government came to power in NSW with the task of managing the economic crisis. This required a new form of politics: ‘corporatism’<sup>48</sup>, where important sectors of industry formed a ‘partnership’ with government to restructure the economy. In the case of the timber industry, this meant more decisive intervention by the Forestry Commission to promote industry restructuring. In the 1960s, industry lobbyists complained that:

If a miller will not modernise nor amalgamate with someone close by ... the Departments are loath to take any positive action because of political implications.

The big question facing the Departments is: If this fragmented situation is not solved fast enough by natural evolution, can the Forestry Commission afford not to take action as owners or custodians of the raw material, despite the inevitable political repercussions and an uproar by many people in the sawmilling industry itself.<sup>49</sup>

At the 1967 Timber Inquiry, the Forestry Commission reaffirmed this position when it argued that it could not directly intervene in industry restructuring. The political costs of ejecting small sawmillers from the industry were far greater than any government department could bear.

But by the mid-1970s, with the economic crisis deepening and the transition from clientalism to corporatism underway, the government was prepared to intervene more decisively to facilitate industry restructuring in the interests of the large sawmills. The Forestry Commission came under increased political pressure to balance its budget and retain legitimacy against the conservation onslaught. It responded by changing its accounting procedures to more accurately reflect its operating costs. The Commission also tried to recover more of these costs from the timber industry by increasing royalties. At the same time, it imposed log quota reductions on the north coast sawmills in an effort to manage the coastal hardwood forests for sustained yield. These policy changes undermined the viability of the small sawmillers since they were the least able to bear the increased cost burdens.<sup>50</sup> Consequently, the forestry conservation campaigns on the north coast speeded up industry restructuring because the more marginal producers were forced out of the industry by this higher cost structure, leaving the larger sawmills better placed to complete their modernisations. Yet

the long term impact of these conservation campaigns were more contradictory. The increasing demands for more national parks jeopardised the investment climate within the timber industry, reinforcing moves towards hardwood disinvestment by the corporate sawmills. In both cases, the result for the north coast timber industry was increased unemployment. I will return to this issue of 'jobs and the environment' in chapter 6. In the next chapter I explore what this process of industry restructuring meant to the workers in the mills and in the forests.

## CHAPTER 2

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### 'The poorest paid and hardest worked': working in the timber industry

The shearers' strike of 1891 has been eulogised within the labour movement with stirring ballads recounting how the shearers took on the might of the landed gentry:

When through the west like thunder rang out the union's  
call  
The sheds will be shore union, or they won't be shore at all  
Now Billy Lane was with us there and his voice was like a  
flame  
We hoisted up our flag of stars and we spoke Eureka's name

But the shearers' militant deeds during the depression of the 1890s have been the exception, rather than the rule, for the rural working class in Australia. Workers in the bush have traditionally been amongst the most exploited of all workers, yet also amongst the most reluctant to take militant industrial action.<sup>1</sup> In the case of the timber workers, their moment of working-class glory was a bitter industrial struggle at the start of the Great Depression. But even in this strike, it was the timber workers in the cities who led the struggle, whilst their rural colleagues simply struggled to survive. In this chapter I explore what the changes discussed

in chapter 1 meant for the workers in the north coast timber industry. As hardwood sawmilling evolved from a cottage industry into modern factory production, neither the pay nor the working conditions of the workers improved, while for much of the time, their union acquiesced in their exploitation.<sup>2</sup>

## **Mill workers and modernisation**

Before the hardwood industry began to modernise in the 1960s, many of the sawmills were located in remote mountain valleys where a small village grew up around the millyard. Long Creek, near Kyogle, was one such village. As well as the sawmill and the houses for the workers, it also boasted a small school, grocery shop and tennis courts. Bernie Jackson, born and bred at Long Creek, vividly remembered the old days in the village. The mill owner, Jack Lever, ruled his sawmill village like a feudal estate and Monday mornings would find him riding into the village from his farm. Lever would spend the week in the village, personally supervising the work in the mill and in the bush, and then return home to his farm on the Friday. This close supervision of the mill was matched by Lever's watchful eye over the village. He knew all the workers and their families by name and, on their retirement, allowed them to live out their days in their cottages. In Bernie's words: 'They were very good that way, the old bosses, they looked after you when you had finished working'. It took an outsider to disturb this cosy scene. As Bernie recalled:

When my father started off as a boiler operator, he worked the first 14 years without a ticket. There was no ... union representatives in our area. I don't think the owners were very happy about unions, they seemed to consider they didn't need them. And there was not much history of the owners doing the wrong thing. That's Mister Lever, the old fellow. We called him Chisel Whiskers



Long Creek during the early 1930s. Before the hardwood industry began to modernise in the 1960s, many of the sawmills were in remote mountain valleys where a small village grew up around the millyard. As well as the sawmill and houses for the workers, Long Creek boasted a small school, grocery shops and tennis courts. (Photo by courtesy of the Forestry Commission of New South Wales.)

because of his ... beard. And there never seemed to be many gripes about. They seemed to be pretty fair. But it wasn't until after the war really, that a man came to work for us at Long Creek. And he'd been an editor of a paper in New Zealand and he was a pretty knowledgeable man who was brought down to his present level by excessive drinking. But he said, 'Things are going to change. The bosses are going to change so we'd better get organised.' And within three months of him saying that, there was 100 per cent union membership.

The era of the feudal sawmill village ended during the 1960s as most of the timber workforce resettled in the larger towns and regional centres. The feudal rule of sawmill owners was replaced by the harsh discipline of the capitalist labour market and the

ever-present threat of dismissal. In recalling the first sawmill he bought in the 1950s, Paul Ryecroft candidly admitted:

We were green. We were there for one week and the staff went on strike. They thought because we were young blokes and didn't know the game, they went on strike and wanted more wages because they didn't think we knew anything. We sacked the lot of them.

Sackings proved a powerful weapon for the sawmillers to discipline their workforce because a pool of unemployed unskilled workers had developed from the 1950s onward as regional economic decline set in. Between 1950 and 1970 the north coast dairy industry lost nearly 60 per cent of its producers and this dramatic decline provided the mills with a new source of unskilled workers.<sup>3</sup> Unable to make a living from their dairy herds but tied to their land, many dairy farmers either bought some logging equipment and went log falling or moved into the ranks of the mill workers.

There were few other employment opportunities outside the timber industry for unskilled rural workers, providing the local mills with a captive labour force. In addition, the mill amalgamations of the 1960s reduced the scope for employment within the industry and further weakened the power of the workers on the shop floor. Doug Edwards and Will Connelly grew up a few houses apart and spent most of their working lives in the same sawmill until they were retrenched in the early 1980s. Sitting around the table in Doug's backyard they reflected:

*Doug Edwards:* ... you weren't game to speak out in case you lost your job. Where was you gonna get another one.

*Will Connelly:* You couldn't get another one.

*Doug Edwards:* If you yapped about, 'Gonna pull the union into it.' The boss he wouldn't tell you straight out you're

finished, but he'd find a way to get rid of you ... See they had everything tied up. As far as that job went ... Like we didn't know any other jobs to go to. And where was you going to pick up another job in the timber, because they owned the whole area around here. They bought mills and they closed them down. That's why they built the one big mill to do away with all these other little mills in the big areas ... We had no other work we could go to as far as the timber industry went around here. And everyone had their own house, or they was buying one ...

As the mills modernised their equipment, so they needed to boost the output from their workforce to get the most from their new investments. In most cases the mills still relied on the traditional management style of a supervisory foreman. As one sawmiller pointed out to the 1967 Timber Inquiry: '... the most important man in the mill is the man with the hobnail boots, walking around in charge of production. That is where your top man should be'.<sup>4</sup> For the workers, the foreman's role was more often that of the petty despot. Bernie Jackson recalled one such foreman whose power got out of hand:

We had one fellow who was a very good worker but he was a bit of an egotist and they decided to give him a go as a foreman. And he came back to the mill after talking with the bosses at headquarters and he was going to make everybody do everything ... where there were three men lifting heavy timber, he thought two men could do it ... He thought that the people in the bush could work longer. And instead of being home at half past four ... he thought that in the summer time they might have been able to start earlier and finish later ... He worked this out for himself, that he would be a big man and he would revolutionise the industry ... They [the workers] just said 'No', they wouldn't do it. And he threatened some with

the sack but they just appealed to the boss at headquarters and the boss called them all together, talked to them and said, 'OK you're right. The men are right. That wouldn't work.' So he was a very chastened man but he still remained foreman. But he fell into line.

Increasingly, control over the workforce became embedded in the new high production machinery. When Carricks bought out Munro and Levers mill at Grevillia in the late 1960s, they installed machinery which increased the log throughput fivefold. For Bernie Jackson, the 'old boss' was replaced by an impersonal corporation and the craft work he had known was supplanted by high-speed, high-volume production:

In the beginning it was a carefree sort of a workday. You worked hard, more consistent than hard. You took pride in your work. You were given time to turn a flitch over and find out which was the best side to cut a piece of timber off ... a friend of mine had a gauge and he stood at the outlet where the timber went out ... and he put his steel gauge on the timber and if it didn't fit properly that piece of timber was rejected, taken back and cut into something else.

Later on ... when this big new mill started and the rush and the bustle, quality was forgotten, quantity was all they wanted. And things changed altogether. Maybe it was easier for the men in the mill but the old people didn't feel happy about it because of the quality of the timbers that was coming out ...

When Carricks started and we became numbers instead of names, people went there and the idea was you went there for the money and the sooner the whistle went in the afternoon, the better. You were just there to cut so much timber. This is my opinion. You went there to cut so much timber, irrespective of quality. As long as you got

that much timber and it went through the mill and out the other end, and you could go home, and you got your pay. There was no more of this pride of workmanship.

But even with their new machinery, the sawmillers could not break free from reliance on human hands and brains. The lack of uniformity in hardwood timbers prevented the mills from fully automating their sawing. So, to make sure they got the greatest output from their equipment, the sawmillers made over-award payments to their most skilled workers and those in key positions on the production line. As sawmiller Paul Rycroft acknowledged:

I know most mills pay nothing above the award but for good staff they will pay a bit, you know, if they've got good workers. See there's certain areas in the plant that rely on production orientated people, who've got to think production, you know what I mean. And if they don't, you can't have them. You've still got to get X amount of wood through ... You normally put them on staff wages ... mainly your breaking down, your saw bench, they're your main areas.

The workers were not ignorant of the various ploys used by the sawmillers to speed up production. When Doug Edwards reflected on his years in the mill, a bitter resignation surfaced in his recollection of these ploys:

They used to coax us there to cut a lot of timber ... if you could cut ... fifty thousand [feet] ... of timber and average it out for a week, they was going to give you a bit of a party in the evening. They give one little bit of a session up there. I think it was two bottles of beer and a few cheese sandwiches and a few biscuits, and then after that episode, they expected you to keep that up all the time for nothing. [laughs] Your wages never jumped.

But there was blokes there that was supposed to be on the award wage was getting paid a few bob extra a week

to push the other fellows that was on the award wage ... [They packed the skids up with logs] You only got to push them a bit and it goes down the line a bit further ... That was going on up there, which it shouldn't have been. But, it's no use growling about it now, it's all over isn't it. As far as we're concerned.

Whilst the unskilled workers bore the brunt of the bosses' power and the constant threat of rural unemployment, the more skilled workers were relatively insulated from both. Within the sawmills, the work was organised in a rigid hierarchy, descending from number one benchman at the top through to the millyard labourers at the bottom. The skilled, long-term workers monopolised the top positions in the hierarchy. As Bernie Jackson recalled:

In those days the mills carried a certain percentage of people who were permanents and they didn't put anybody else on in that job until that fellow died. And you sorta waited around and when somebody died you got their job.

And Laurie Douglas, another old hand in the timber industry, recalled his days at the Grevillia mill:

There were some [jobs that were more interesting or better than others] ... and he wouldn't want to let it go. And that used to happen. I've seen some chaps on jobs for 30 years and more and never do another job ...

This situation led to a compliant workforce amongst those next in line for the best positions. It also produced a high turnover of unskilled workers, particularly younger workers who were regularly stuck with the 'dead end' work. Paddy McInnes, who worked in a large hardwood mill near Wauchope for nearly twenty years, commented:

over a period of twelve months there was 750 people went through that mill, of come and goes.

When it came to mill closures, the workers were usually the last to know their fate. Information about the forest resources and the marketing problems in the industry was not widely available amongst the workforce. Particularly for the large corporate sawmills, their disinvestment strategies met little opposition because of the secrecy surrounding them. Doug Edwards and Will Connelly reflected on their last years at Grevillia as Carricks prepared the ground for their departure:

*Interviewer:* During the last few years up at the mill ... what was that like in the mill? Were the blokes aware of the problems?

*Doug Edwards:* No they couldn't find out nothing. What was going on. Everyone had an idea there was something going on but every time you asked the bosses ... they sort of just kept it to themselves.

*Will Connelly:* They wouldn't say nothing.

*Doug Edwards:* I knew for a long time ... that the rate of logs that was coming in started to go down. We wasn't getting as many logs in ... We could see that they was easing up on the bush ... we thought there was something going on. And every time you'd ask them, 'Oh no, we've just got a few too many logs, that's all.' ... And all the excuses in the world ...

*Will Connelly:* The last six months ... I was out pushing lantana and putting dams in with the tractor. We knew there was something going on.

## **Log falling in the bush**

Whilst the sawmillers increasingly gained greater control over their workforce with new machinery and closer supervision, the supply of logs from the bush remained a more difficult area for them to

control. For this reason, contract log falling became the dominant mode of work because it removed the need for direct supervision. In turn, the contract system fostered strong rural attitudes of 'hard work' and self-reliance amongst the workers.

In the 1950s, log fallers worked on a piece rate basis and were obliged to camp out in the bush during the week. Will Connelly was a bushworker during this time and his comments highlighted the effect of this work on his family life:

We started off like ... we was only kids. We followed our fathers' footsteps and what it amounted to, we didn't know any better. We just went in and thought that was only a job. But we realised, when it was too late, that we wasted our time, both of us here ... by stopping with the timber industry on the north coast ... We'd a been better off down in Sydney or out on those Snowy River schemes and all that sort of stuff ... We'd a been a lot better off. Conditions 'd been easier. We had our wives left at home, young families. They knew more about the butcher and the baker than what they knew about their fathers. We'd go out Monday morning before they was awake, and we'd come back Friday night. And then we'd be gone again on Saturday morning and Sunday morning ... It'd only be Saturday night and Sunday night we'd have anything to do with them, the family ...

Increasingly, workers were no longer prepared to camp in the bush and the improvements in transport (such as widespread use of four wheel drive vehicles) made working in the bush and living in the towns feasible. Moreover, with the wider use of chainsaws and tractors large gangs of workers were replaced by small teams of two or three workers (a faller and a snigger/tractor driver, for example). At the same time, the capital costs of log extraction, particularly tractors and trucks, began to rival the value of the small sawmillers' entire plant. Consequently, many sawmillers increasingly obtained

their log supplies from logging contractors rather than employing their own fallers and drivers. By the mid-1960s, 60 per cent of log fallers were already working as contractors, and by the mid-1970s, this figure had risen to 75 per cent.<sup>5</sup>

Contracting suited the mills. Walter Kenyon, a sawmill manager near Kyogle, outlined how contract payment largely removed the problem of supervision:

It's better that way in the bush because they can work when they feel like it. If they want to really get stuck in there and earn plenty of money, they can do so. You don't have to have the supervision that you have with wages chaps.

For the sawmillers, payment by results not only removed the problem of supervising the working day, it also removed the uncertainty which an adverse geography imposed on production. For the north coast timber industry the weather and the terrain stood in the way of efficient production. The timber resource was scattered over a large area of rugged mountainous terrain, making the costs and logistical difficulties of supervising logging a considerable burden. Moreover, in many of the north coast forests it was only possible to work in the bush in dry weather and sawmillers faced the risks of many weeks of lost labour if a wet spell set in. Contracting out the logging resolved these dilemmas for the millers: payment by results eliminated the need for direct supervision in the bush and it passed the costs of long distances and uncertain weather onto the workers. Betty Corrigan, herself a worker in a sawmill office, seemed resigned to her husband's conditions:

My husband's been in it, what, probably twenty years ... Can't seem to get him away from it. I've tried ... cause I think family wise, they're long hours ... My husband gets up at half past three. He drives to [inaudible]. But they've

always worked those sort of hours and getting home at half past six, quarter to seven. It's a long day ... and again, with this weather, very frustrating [not knowing if they'll work] ... Not only that, the guys are lost, aren't they. We've had a lot of wet weather since Christmas.

**And Will Connelly concluded:**

I think we'd a been better off in the mill. Because you had your regular pay. You knew it was coming all the time. You might make a lot more some weeks in the bush, but over an average I think you'd a been better off in the mill on wages.

Payment by results also allowed the sawmillers to cheapen the costs of labour. They could do this directly by exploiting the workers' ignorance:

*Doug Edwards:* But I could never ever find out what the snigging rate or the cutting rate or anything was because they wouldn't show it to you ... it was between them and the Forestry ... we didn't know whether we was getting a fifth share or a tenth share or what we was getting ... they must have been covering up something or they would have showed us ...

*Will Connelly:* If you fell a dud tree in the bush, and it was no good, well you get so much for falling that dud tree ... But they'd never tell what you had to get. They'd pay you so much, but they wouldn't tell you. But anyhow, one day I did find out about it. Some bloke in Casino, a forestry fellow in Casino, he wrote down all the lists of the sizes of the stumps and what price they was, all of it, see. When I come back up here I give it to all the fallers that was up here. And they wanted to know how they got that.

*Interviewer:* The bosses wanted to know?

*Will Connelly:* Yeah, how they got all this information.

*Interviewer:* They were worried about it?

*Will Connelly:* Oh yeah, they had to pay the full lot then. Everyone knew about it.

Alternatively, labour could also be cheapened indirectly because the contracting rates did not keep pace with the increased production which the new technology allowed. Bill Longworth, a retired forestry foreman now living near Wauchope, observed in an anxious tone:

That's one thing ... that's always bugged me ... Just the chainsaws have made the difference. The bloke's still the same, he's still a human being, but he's not getting the differences that's there. Somebody else is getting it. He's speeded the whole show up, as having that log on the ground ready for the tractor to get hold of it. But he hasn't had any more money by it.

Even though contracting was the primary method of employment, log fallers were still workers. Their means of payment hid their real status: just because they owned their equipment (such as their chain saws) this did not mean they had broken free from the domination of the sawmillers. But in their attitudes, they expressed the illusory freedom that is the hallmark of the self-employed. The fortunes of the contractor were tied closely to the vagaries of the market: in a period of high demand very good incomes could be made. During a downturn, debt—maybe ruin—could be the outcome. At the same time, the vagaries of geography meant that some contractors with a good patch of forest and a long dry spell might do very well compared with contractors facing more difficult conditions. Hence, individual success was highly variable. The collective experience of waged labour was replaced by the individualised experience of high income for 'hard work'. As the following example shows, contracting provided the log faller with

direct evidence of individual success. Mike O'Farrell's comments show that output and personal esteem rose and fell together:

For you to pick up a chain saw and go walking up into the forest with it, you'd probably only go from here to my front gate and you'd be kerfooted ... I suppose you just build up an inner strength that you can carry on with it and that makes it a lot easier. I think if you love what you're doing that's the main thing, that's half the battle. I love being a timber worker. I find it quite easy myself ...

If they didn't love it, they wouldn't be in it. They certainly wouldn't be there for the money that's in it because there's no more money in it than's in other jobs. The thing is you've got to produce something to be rewarded for it, that's what I find ... If I don't produce an X amount of logs per day well I just don't get any money, that's what it amounts to ...

Besides being on a contract rate makes you feel like you want to do something. If you're on a set wage, you know it's there every Friday whether you produce something or not ... Being on a contract rate I like to know that I've got to produce so much per week for what I get and it's there to show that you've done that ... By being a sole contractor you do it when it suits you, you're your own boss, you don't have to go to work at a certain time if you don't want to, and you come home when it suits you. If it's wet for the day and you don't want to work, well you don't have to work. By being a sole employee sort of thing, you please your self. But I'm pretty keen and I like to go to work every day.

Contracting created an illusion of freedom because there was no visible figure of the 'boss' standing over the worker, dictating the pace and method of work, grudgingly parting with payment for expended labour. Instead, there was the apparent freedom of

working one's own hours, when and where the worker wanted. In reality, with rising costs and protracted periods of wet weather, to earn a good living log fallers were obliged to work long and arduous days. Instead of a human boss, they were under the sway of the 'dull compulsion of capitalist economic life', a master more demanding than any mill owner. Andy Johnson, a Wauchope dairy farmer who became a log faller, conceded:

I've still got the farm but that's only weekend cause you can't make a living out of the farm. Quite frankly I don't make a living out of the bush either. My wife works all the time ... I suppose if I put full time into it instead of working the farm on weekends and that and worked the bush weekends ... If you could get three load a day, five days a week ... you'd probably do alright ... but weatherwise and that you can't do it ... You can't work [in the rain] it's too damn dangerous and usually you can't get the truck in or anything. So you're not, you're not getting enough ...

This precarious working life did not lead to any kind of collective response from the contractors because so much of their labour process was individualised. The varied fortunes of different contractors combined with rural attitudes of 'rugged individualism' to undermine any expression of the collective experience of exploitation. When Nimbin log haulier, Robbie Fellows, was approached to join a union he responded with an angry rejection:

He just asked us did we own the vehicles ourselves and what we were doing and were we in the Transport Workers Union ... we said no, and he said, 'Oh well youse have to join' ... when you're a contractor and you're battling for a living, you hate somebody to tell you that you've got to do this, or you've got to do that. It's hard enough surviving as it is at times.

## The Timber Workers' Union

Robbie's antipathy towards unions was also part of a wider rural distaste for the trade union movement. As mentioned earlier, many of the timber workers came from a dairying background, where long hours and hard work were the norm. For Neville Hicks, ex-dairy farmer, mill life seemed luxurious after years of feeding 'the poddies in the pouring rain'. For Burt Jenkins, a retired forestry foreman from the Lismore area, trade unions were just the refuge of the shirker:

I'll tell you one thing. It's been my experience. You find an active unionist and you'll find a lazy man ... I've only known two or three staunch unionists and they've done less work than anybody. They want this, that and everything else.

The Timber Workers Union did little to endear itself to the rural working class. For many years it was regarded as a 'bosses' union' and was totally ineffective in defending its members against the abuses of the sawmillers. To understand why this was so, we need to go back to the 1930s.

In 1929, the timber workers, coalminers and waterside workers—the most militant unionists in that era—engaged in protracted strikes against the reductions in pay and conditions which heralded the beginning of the Great Depression. The timber workers' strike was provoked by the Lukin Award which lengthened the workers' hours, reduced their wages, and sought to replace skilled workers with juniors.<sup>6</sup> After ten months of struggle, the union was beaten: its leaders had been charged with conspiracy and its members effectively starved into submission. Though the struggle was largely confined to the large Sydney sawmills and timber yards the impact of this defeat had wider and longer-term repercussions. After 1929 there were no more major stoppages and most of the disputes

which lead to short stoppages were in ‘mixed industries’ where the actions of other unionists were mainly responsible for any militancy.<sup>7</sup>

In 1943 Joe Weir became the New South Wales secretary of the Timber Workers’ Union and remained in that position until his retirement in 1985. His career included a period in the Legislative Council, as well as numerous Labour Council and Labor Party positions. His approach to union affairs mirrored his conservative labour politics: he aimed for a harmonious dialogue with the employers and a ‘slow but steady’ improvement in the wages and conditions of his members.<sup>8</sup>

But so ineffective was the union in improving pay and conditions that many workers came to regard it as virtually a bosses’ union. Frank Sawtell, who rose through the ranks of the workers to become a mill manager, bitterly noted:

Well it is the lowest labour paid industry you could pick. There’s no lower paid worker in existence in Australia. And there’s no less active union advocator than The Timber Worker in Australia. So that they’ve got no chance ... from the union to get their lot improved ... The Timber Workers’ Union, I think it’s a blot on unionism ... because of its low key approach. It’d be a big deal to win a pair of boots for you every six months ... It was firmly believed by the workers that the union was in the employers’ pocket. Something I’ll never know, how it occurred.

The absence of industrial conflict after the Second World War provided the sawmillers with a smooth run.<sup>9</sup> Fred Cooper, who spent a lifetime working at the Yarras mill near Wauchope, recalled:

I worked here, as I say, for just on thirty years and there was no strikes.

Far from engaging in militant unionism, the Timber Workers' Union was pre-occupied with surviving. Most of its energy was directed at chasing after unfinancial members and, occasionally, officials who absconded with the members' fees<sup>10</sup> and for a long period in the 1960s it had no organiser working on the south coast. The union's major activity on behalf of its members was winning accident compensation for them. This pre-occupation reflected not simply the realities of a dangerous industry but a careful ploy to increase union membership. The union's newsletter, *The NSW Timber Worker* regularly contained graphic accounts of accidents to workers and the compensation settlements won for them by the union. These were interspersed with numerous pointed stories about the fate of non-members and their widows. The emphasis on accidents and compensation was calculated to exert pressure on non-members to join the union and on existing members to continue to pay their fees.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, the membership of the Timber Workers' Union steadily declined as the industry restructured. The mill amalgamations and modernisations seriously depleted the workforce in the timber industry. Whereas in the mid-1950s nearly 12,000 workers were employed in New South Wales sawmills, by the mid-1970s this figure had nearly halved.<sup>12</sup> Two particular developments compounded the problem. First, a large proportion of the unskilled workforce changed jobs rapidly and many left the industry altogether. At the same time, workers from other industries migrated into the timber industry for brief periods before returning to their normal work. This high turnover in the workforce produced a very unstable union membership.

Second, there were major changes during the 1960s and early 1970s in the merchandising of timber. Traditionally, Sydney's waterfront had been dotted with many large timber yards where oregon flitches from North America were unloaded and then



A small family-operated bush sawmill cutting privately owned forest near Wauchope. The small bush sawmills had the worst working conditions and highest accident rates in the industry. (Author's collection.)

recut, finished and retailed. Throughout the 1960s these timber yards steadily closed or relocated to the outer suburbs. By the early 1970s dressed timber was increasingly imported and many of the timber merchants closed their large city sawmills and concentrated on marketing the finished imports. As a result of these changes, large numbers of timber workers lost their jobs in the inner city. Moreover, the large concentrations of workers on a single site—sometimes over 500—became a thing of the past. Thus the union faced a declining membership and a dispersed membership, conditions which severely hampered effective union organising and undermined the likelihood of militant trade unionism in the timber industry.<sup>13</sup>

The union was unable and unwilling to halt the exodus of labour from the industry. Despite the retrenchments, the union approved of industry restructuring, viewing it as one answer to poor conditions. In particular, the closure of bush sawmills was welcomed because the workers in these mills had always been the most difficult to organise and had also endured the worst working conditions.<sup>14</sup> The union looked forward to their replacement by larger company mills where the organisers stood a better chance of signing up members and where the working and the safety conditions were much better.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, the timber industry was a highly competitive sector and sawmillers had easy access to ‘job blackmail’—the threat of closure if the union did not co-operate. Peter Markham, a corporate forester with a detailed knowledge of his hardwood mill, explained how their modernisation programme was explicitly aimed at reducing the work-force:

In the early seventies ... for a capital investment of between eight and twelve thousand dollars we could replace a man. Which was a payback period of about eighteen months in those days. And therefore we replaced

quite a number of men throughout the mill ... We had a policy of implementing changes in the number of men on benches. They were in fact three man benches ... They are now one man benches ... It's unashamedly a reduction in labour and an increase in productivity. That's a matter of plain straight out survival ... Because there's a lot of small operators. No one operator can ever command anything like a controlling interest in the market place ... And on top of that you've got large volumes of timber coming in from the West Coast of America, New Zealand and the Pacific region.

**This left the union with little power to intervene:**

It's done with the full knowledge and understanding of the union ... There's not much option when you put it to the union that if you do that, the company either stays viable and profitable, or the company doesn't stay viable and profitable and there's no jobs. It's as simple as that ... We oscillate from reasonably buoyant conditions to survival conditions. I mean survival.

Union organisers on the north coast faced a formidable task with hundreds of small saw mills scattered across hundreds of miles of difficult terrain. Organisers would be lucky if they could visit each of the mills in their region just once a year. To this logistical difficulty was added poor union resources. The union fees were exceptionally low and this created hardship for organisers in the field. After nearly twenty years working in the mills, Paddy McInnes became a union organiser, only to find he'd swapped one kind of hardship for another:

To go any further north than Kempsey, required you to stay away from home ... \$28.50, they allowed you a week for accommodation ... Well \$28.50, you couldn't stay in a motel for longer than one night. So you more or less had to have a bed in the back of the station waggon ...

Some of the mills you'd go to ... how could you talk conditions, to improve conditions ... when I'd say, 'You've got better conditions than what I've got. I'm around here trying to represent you blokes and you're going home to sleep in a bed of a night. And I'm going back up along the road there to sleep in a station waggon.'

For the workers, their remoteness led to bitterness about the usefulness of the union. Rhonda Myles was scathing:

They never worried about the fellows up here, the little fellows out in the bush like we were. If it'd had happened in Sydney, all hell'd've broke loose over some of the things that some ... complained about ...

Once a year ... it came round time for the fees to be paid. The boys'd be out in their numbers and that's about the only time they ever worried about us. They didn't want to come out to these sort of places ... You're just a country bumpkin up here, you don't matter.

With the union's head office in distant Sydney, a heavy onus fell upon the district organisers. Yet the scope for initiative at the local level was constrained by the centralised bureaucracy of the union. In 1950, one organiser attempted to combat piece work and contract practices in his local district. Secretary Weir warned: 'While I appreciate that an organiser can get first hand information, you must realize that all of these matters must be dealt with by Head Office and not by the local branch officer. This entails a lot of red tape but it is the only way'.<sup>16</sup>

Thirty years later, Paddy McInnes attempted to mobilise locally against the conservationist threat. With Joe Weir still ensconced in the Sydney office, the outcome was very much the same:

For the two years that I worked for the Timber Workers' Union, as an organiser on the coast here, that was just

around about the time of the flare up of the conservationists up around the Terania Creek area ... and I went round Grafton a lot and the men wanted to do things up there. Organise rallies and have stop work and they wanted to get out and into the bush and get stuck into these hippies and that sort of thing, you know.

And whatever things that I did suggest, at two or three different times, at meetings in Grafton, things that I thought we should do, and I contacted the union secretary in Sydney ... and he said, 'No. No. Just be calm. We'll handle it from down this end.' You know. And that's how he put it off all the time ...

It was political ... Whatever they were doing down there, I don't know. But I think the union knew what was happening in the industry two years before the men knew what was going to happen and they didn't know till it did happen, you know ... It was behind closed doors and it was a deal worked somewhere along the line I'd say between the union, the employers of the timber industry and the government regarding these closures of forests.

Moreover, when the organisers arrived at a mill site the conditions of the union award prevented them organising effectively:

[union officials] shall have the right to enter employers' working establishments during meal times ... only at the place where they are taking their meals ... if any employer alleges that a representative is unduly interfering with this working establishment or is creating disaffection amongst his employees, or is offensive in his methods ... such employer may refuse the right of entry ... <sup>17</sup>

Some of the small family sawmillers could rely on the personal loyalty of their workers to keep the union at bay. Jock Wright, the sawmiller from Kyogle, recalled:

Like people left ... Either that or they died on the job, like. I've had some there for twenty years. I've got one chap over there now, he's been there for about 22 years ... I had another chap there for seventeen, another fellow for twelve, another one eleven ...

But for the larger mills, particularly the corporate sawmills, the best strategy for containing militancy amongst their workers was to 'work with' the union. In Walter Kenyon's mill, for example:

In the early stages it would have been very small minority of members in the Timber Workers' Union. In more recent times, and they did this through the back door to some extent I think, our company is virtually a closed company. We recommend to our fellows and try and insist on them being members of the union. Though personally I don't hold with that to any great extent. I don't think you should force someone to be something if they don't want to be.

Why is that company policy? [Interviewer]

Well they sort of made a bit of a deal with the unions. And I suppose maybe in recognition of the fact that it had been a fairly peaceful union and also the fact that say, in the last ten years, there's been a lot of body snatching in unions. You know, where a militant union wants to build its strength up, it'll go round to other industries and try and enrol their members with a promise, 'Look what we got for our blokes' and all that sort of thing. And to that extent it sort of kept the others out, if they were already members of one union.

## Conclusion

This pattern of industrial relations was consolidated during the rainforest controversy. In the same way that the Timber Workers' Union backed the sawmillers' moves toward industry restructuring, so too did it fall into line behind their defence of the forests. Joe Weir regularly joined sawmillers on speaking platforms and in delegations to ministers. Weir also lobbied strenuously within the New South Wales Labour Council to oppose Labor Party support for the conservationists.<sup>18</sup> In turn, the sawmillers began to encourage their workers to join the union so that their political lobbying of Labor ministers might be more effective. The end result of these developments was that management and union, rarely in conflict, moved even closer together.

## CHAPTER 3

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### 'They'd do anything to have a job': working-class culture

The Italian socialist, Antonio Gramsci, once wrote that: 'everyone is a philosopher, though in his own way and unconsciously, since even in the slightest manifestation of any intellectual activity whatever, in "language", there is contained a specific conception of the world.'<sup>1</sup>

Yet this role of 'philosopher'—or in more general terms, 'intellectual'—is not undertaken by everyone. In a class society, with its rigid division of labour, the only intellectual roles given social recognition are those undertaken by middle-class workers. Yet manual workers do develop sophisticated 'conceptions of the world' though they fashion these from different intellectual tools than those handled by the middle class. As this chapter will show, for workers in the timber industry, their tools were not sharpened in the small bush schools dotted along the north coast but in the harsh world of the sawmill and the bush.

## School and work

Many of the older workers in the north coast timber industry left school at 14 and went to work in the bush or in a local mill. During the Great Depression, and even into the 1950s, there was little opportunity for further schooling because the small village schools did not progress beyond early high school. If students wanted to take their schooling further, they had to move to the larger regional centres. But lack of transport, and the prohibitive costs of boarding, prevented many from doing this.

For those workers reared during the Depression, economic hardship sentenced them to a life in the mills. Bill Longworth, a forestry foreman nearing retirement, looked back to his youth and affirmed:

Oh school was alright ... I enjoyed school fairly well.

If there had been more school [after third form], would you have stuck with school longer? [Interviewer]

Probably not. Cause I was the eldest of six boys ... The youngest was a school teacher and I went to the bush, so there's the difference see ... I think the thing was to get going. We never had any money, enough to spend those times. The idea was that if you left school and got a job, you suddenly had something to spend. Money was pretty scarce and course, being five others in the family besides me, meant there wasn't much about.

In such a climate, earning an income was seen as more valuable than going to school. I asked Bernie Jackson if he'd ever considered staying on longer at school:

No. No. The one thing that people wanted to do in those days was to get a job. I remember I was getting 14 shillings a week and I had to keep myself out of that ... I remember the first pair of boots I bought. I was that proud

of them and I wore them everywhere to show people that I was working. I was a working man and I had my own boots. That was terrific.

The geography of isolation and the hardship of rural poverty gave manual workers few options in their working lives. Laurie Douglas, nearing retirement as a number one benchman at the local mill, recognised that he had exercised little choice in his younger days:

Well I'll be honest with you. The only reason I worked in the timber industry because of necessity. To exist. But I didn't dislike it ... Like I tell some of the young chaps out here at work, sometimes they whinge about what somebody else is getting. And I'll say to them, 'Well you don't have to work here. You're only here by choice.' There's nobody standing over them, making them. Nobody stood over me and made me work in the mill. But I had to exist, and I was rearing a family.

Even in the post-war period, with its greater material security, the situation changed little in the more remote country areas. Mike O'Farrell, a log faller from the generation reared in the 1950s, recounted his enthusiasm to leave behind the classroom:

The reason I wanted to go to the bush was, you know, it was a job and being keen I suppose, to have a job, I felt school wasn't much use to me. So I wanted to get away from school as quick as possible and start working in the bush where everybody in the area was either a farmer or a bushperson ... To become a bushman you didn't need any education ... To go to school I thought was a terrible bore really. But I suppose you needed some sort of an education but I think you'll find most bushmen haven't got a good education as far as that goes. You don't need an education to fall a tree and snig it out of the bush. I suppose that's an education on its own when you look at it.

Those who chose the local mill, also chose gruelling manual work in conditions of great hardship. Workers like Paddy McInnes regretted their choice of a job, but equally conceded it was not a real choice:

Conditions were not good, you know ... You'd sit down to a daytime and the wind would be blowing the sawdust and that on your sandwiches ... you'd have to sit down at the old open fire and the smoke'd be blowing. It was rough, you know, in the early days, she was a pretty rough old industry and a pretty rough old game ... Well really, now I can say I don't think there's any really good part about working in a timber mill. But in an area like this it was work and where there's not a real lot of other jobs to go to. If I had my time over again I'd try to avoid working in a timber mill, put it that way.

As well as the physical hardship of mill work, there was minimal job satisfaction or long-term security. The best positions in the mill were monopolised by the older, more skilled workers, job rotation was largely non-existent and the work was often boring and monotonous. As Laurie Douglas recalled:

When I finally got a job, the old boss who was in charge, he didn't want me to start. He didn't want to give me a job. Because he thought that I could do better ... He thought it was such a dead-end sort of a job and he'd seen so many people in and out of it that he thought I'd find something better for meself. I went and asked him several times before I left school, 'Can I start when I finish school?' And he said that he'd rather me look around and find something else. He said ... he'd get me a job in one of the garages to train as a mechanic or in the office or something like that, see.

Even though they could see that manual jobs were dead-end jobs, many timber workers embraced mill work enthusiastically.

As Bernie Jackson's earlier comments showed, there was a lot of esteem attached to being a 'working man' and wearing boots. Here the contrast was with the dependency—and effeminate nature—of being still at school. For men, self-esteem is strongly tied to the traditional breadwinning role associated with masculinity.<sup>2</sup> In Andrew Tolson's words:

For men, definitions of masculinity enter into the way work is personally experienced, as a life-long commitment and responsibility. In some respects work itself is made palatable only through the kinds of compensations masculinity can provide—the physical effort, the comradeship, the rewards of promotion. When work is unpalatable, it is often only his masculinity (his identification with the wage; 'providing for the wife and kids') that keeps a man at work day after day.<sup>3</sup>

Because of these strong links between manual work, breadwinning and masculinity, timber workers based their intellectual self-esteem on gaining practical knowledge, particularly knowledge that arose directly out of their labour process. They contrasted this knowledge with the knowledge found in books, knowledge which was not part of 'real work', and knowledge which was remote from the world of work. In essence, they rejected the knowledge which they had left behind when they left the classroom.

The division between manual and mental labour—the intellectual division of labour—is inherently contradictory. In the same way that any task involves both conception and execution, so too does any knowledge of the world contain both a theoretical and a practical dimension. It is only under an alienating division of labour that these integrated dimensions of human activity are fragmented.

For most working-class people, practical knowledge is regarded as more valuable than theoretical knowledge. This is partly

because practical knowledge obviously has greater relevance and usefulness. But it is also partly because workers recognise that theoretical knowledge—in the form of educationally certified learning—is a means whereby those in power dominate workers and undermine their self-esteem. Something of the ambiguity of this process comes through in Paul Willis's comments on the British industrial working class:

[there is] the massive feeling on the shop floor, and in the working class generally, that practice is more important than theory ... The shop floor abounds with apocryphal stories about the idiocy of purely theoretical knowledge. Practical ability always comes first and is a condition of other kinds of knowledge. Whereas in middle-class culture knowledge and qualifications are seen as a way of shifting upwards the whole mode of practical alternatives open to an individual, in working-class eyes theory is riveted to particular productive practices. If it cannot earn its keep there, it is to be rejected ... [there is a] class function of knowledge. The working-class view would be the rational one, were it not located in class society, i.e. that theory is only useful in so far as it really does help to do things, to accomplish practical tasks and change nature. Theory is asked to be in a close dialectic with the material world. For the middle class, more aware of its position in a class society, however, theory is seen partly in its social guise of qualifications as the power to move up on the social scale. In this sense theory is well worth having even if it is never applied to nature. It serves its purpose in society as a ticket to travel. Paradoxically, the working class distrust and rejection of theory comes partly from a kind of recognition, even in the moment that it oppresses, of the hollowness of theory in its social guise.<sup>4</sup>

Yet for the timber workers, certified knowledge, and its provider—formal education—was also valued as one of the few

exits from dead-end working class jobs. As Paddy McInnes mused:

I didn't like school very much, really. I got out as soon as I could. Sorry now I did, you know. If I'd put as much effort into me school work as what I've put into me work since I've left school, I mightn't have never been in a timber mill, you know.

As Bill Longworth commented earlier, school teaching was a better option than timber work. From at least the 1920s until the 1960s, becoming a teacher was one of the few exits from manual jobs for children born into working-class families. That option was taken in the full knowledge that a better future lay on the mental side of the intellectual division of labour.

## **Work and education**

Education did not cease when the walls of the classroom were left behind. Indeed, timber workers viewed the bush as their classroom and their fellow workers as their teachers. Robbie Fellows offered a vivid glimpse of this process:

The main skills you needed was to listen to somebody. I first started logging and I thought I knew everything when I first started ... and then these older blokes started telling me what to do and what not to do. And when you think about it, well it's right ... You seem to be able to learn for quite a number of years all along the line. Somebody keeps telling you something different. You think, 'Well I've never ever tried that but I might try that'. And lots of times it works ...

A cutter, a bloke might be sharpening his chainsaw for quite a while. And he goes along and sees another bloke and says, 'Gees that bloke's chain's cutting twice as good as mine'. Which you still often see, you know. And they have a look at it, and one bloke says, 'Oh well you've got too

much hook on that teeth on this side, and not enough on this side. Or you haven't got your rakers down low enough' ...

There was a young bloke at the mill down here ... having a bit of trouble with the chain saw sharpening for the mill. I got the cutter to come in here last week and he showed him ... Where other blokes have talked about it. Said, 'You should be doing this, you should be doing that'. And it just didn't work for him, you know. But when this bloke come and actually showed him how to do it, well it's worked for him.

Paddy McInnes provided another example:

I'd had experience say of fifteen years in the mill and a new fellow'd come into the mill and started to work and I'd noticed him doing things that I thought he shouldn't do. Go up and say to him, 'Look mate, don't do that anymore. You're gonna loose a hand, or you could kill somebody else by doing it that way'. And show him the right way of doing it.

Practical knowledge was valued in these settings because it could be directly evaluated. It either worked or it didn't. Unlike studying a problem in a distant setting or through reading books, the value of practical knowledge was direct and immediate. This was evident in the responses timber workers developed to deal with the hazards of their industry.

One of the most severe costs born by manual workers in industry is the danger to life and limb. In every facet of the timber industry, danger abounded. In the late 1960s, the NSW timber industry had an accident rate four times greater than any other industry. Delegates to a safety seminar in 1968 were warned that a situation of 'plague proportions' existed,<sup>5</sup> though for the sawmillers and the government, the problem was one of economic

costs, not human suffering. In 1966 the total costs of accidents in the timber industry for the early 1960s had been calculated at \$10 million.<sup>6</sup> For the sawmillers, this meant high insurance premiums. During the mid-1960s several of the large timber companies responded to this situation by setting up training and safety programs in their mills. Through such efforts, the largest sawmill company in the state, Allen Taylors, reduced its accident frequency rate by 73 per cent in under three years.<sup>7</sup>

It was mainly the large sawmills which made these efforts. With their tight cost structures, small sawmills were reluctant to set up training programs and so, despite individual sawmill improvements, the industry as a whole continued to suffer chronically high accident levels.<sup>8</sup> During the 1980s, the sawmillers became increasingly agitated about the high cost of their workers' compensation insurance premiums.<sup>9</sup> By 1986 workers' compensation had become a major political issue across all industry sectors and in 1987 the Unsworth Labor Government replaced the 1926 Workers' Compensation Act with a new Act which severely limited workers' rights in favour of the employers and the insurance companies. In 1989 the issue of workers' compensation returned to the political agenda as the Greiner Liberal Government sought to further reduce the cost to employers of work place accidents.

In the mills timber workers suffered severe injuries from exposed machinery, particularly saw blades, and from flying pieces of timber. In the long term they developed chronic back pain from the heavy lifting and loss of hearing from the noise of the milling. But it was the log fallers and log hauliers out in the bush who faced the most hazardous working conditions in the industry.<sup>10</sup> Many timber workers told of relatives or friends killed or maimed whilst tree felling in the bush. Several, like Andy Johnson, had personal experiences of near misses:

I got a saw jammed in a tree ... and I couldn't get it out and I couldn't get the wedge in to lift it off ... so the tractor dug a bit of a hole in behind. It was on a fairly steep hill ... and he just pushed the tree with the blade but ... it went a little bit different to where it was faced. And it hit into another tree and that tree lent over that far and then came back and broke off ...

Like I pulled the saw out when he let the weight off it but I just couldn't get away. It happened too quick and the limbs all came back and hit me all over. I was running, but it got me all down the back ... I just sort of sat there and I couldn't get up for a while and then after half an hour I felt all right, and then I just went on working.

But oh man, did I get crook on the weekend. I couldn't work for three months ... I had dreadful headaches, lumps and bruises down my back, cause I got the full head of the tree sort of just down the back.

The log hauliers had to drive steep winding mountain roads, always treacherous in wet weather. On arrival at the mill, the dangers increased, as Robbie Fellows found to his distress:

Loading and unloading is one of your worst enemies ... you can't take your eyes off logs ... I got to a mill one day. And I'd been pulling there for years and years and did the same thing every day. And I woke up underneath the truck with all me ribs broken down one side.

What had happened? [*Interviewer*]

A log just come off the top of the truck and whacked me. It skinned me from the shoulder right down the back of me leg. If I'd a been probably half an inch further back, I just wouldna been talking today, you know. So. The blokes come looking for me, there I was, cold as a cucumber underneath the truck. They thought I was having a sleep.

[Laughs] ... There'd be three or four blokes I know have been killed virtually the same way, in a mill yard, taking the chains off and the log just come off and hit them.

To deal with the hazards of their industry, timber workers relied on their practical knowledge. They developed a set of routines and habits based on long years of personal experience and the cautionary tales of other people's accidents. Here is how Mike O'Farrell explained it:

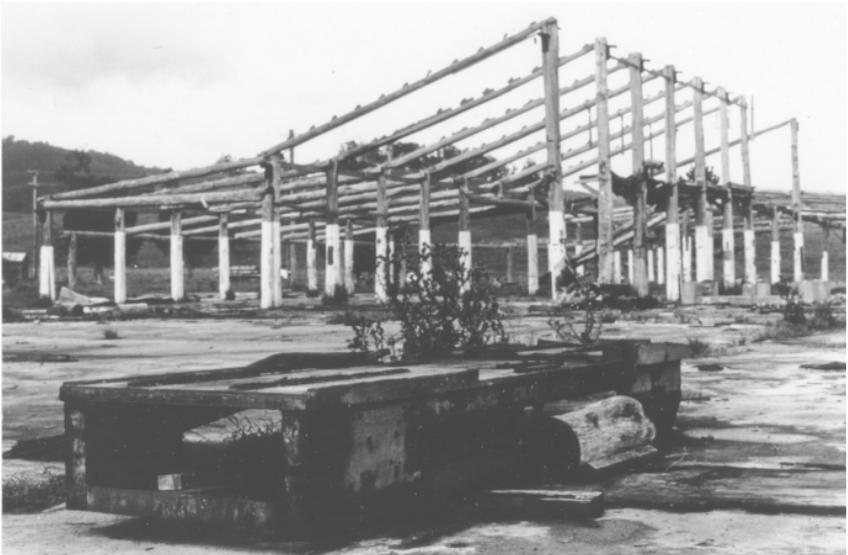
After twenty five years experience I know what can cause an accident ... If you're driving a machine around a steep slope and that, you know what'll go round before it's going to tip over. If that's likely to happen you put in a side cut. Tilt your blade and put in a side cut. Same thing with the skidder. If it's too dangerous to go there and get the log, you know what it'll do, don't go there. Let the tractor go and do it. That avoids the machine tipping over. Lots of the accidents caused are just through inexperience.

Many of the other timber workers had similar stories: anecdotes of friends killed in the bush or in the mills and the lessons to be drawn from their accidents. The safety habits and routines developed may have been below the standards set elsewhere in the industry,<sup>11</sup> but for the timber workers themselves, the reality of their continued survival was evidence that their traditional knowledge and personal experience were valuable. Will Connelly summed it up well:

Just that we followed our father's advice ... that put us through our lifetime in the bush, that put us through without any injuries ... What you could push and what you couldn't. What to look for. Limbs hanging up and all that. No, it was a very dangerous job but it didn't seem that. It's only when you stop and start talking about it that we realise how dangerous it was. It's just that we was brought up in it and it just came natural to us to be careful.



Felling a forest giant: tree felling in particular was seen as exclusively a man's domain. It was presumed to require great bravery, the kind of bravery only 'men' could show. (Photo by courtesy of the Forestry Commission of New South Wales.)



The poles, and other remains, of the plymill at Yarras, near Wauchope. It closed in 1982, a casualty of the conservationist campaign to stop rainforest logging. (Author's collection.)

The hazardous nature of the timber industry reinforced its masculine image. Though women worked in manual jobs throughout the industry, especially in the plywood mills, their presence was never fully acknowledged. Tree felling in particular was seen as exclusively a man's domain. It was presumed to require great bravery, the kind of bravery only 'men' could show. This was reinforced by the heroic mythology of the timber industry, as shown in the 1930s film, *Tall Timbers*. Here, the dashing hero proposed a 'timber drive' as the answer to the desperate plight of a small sawmiller unable to fill his contract and about to be sent bankrupt by the villains. This 'timber drive' involved cutting half way through all the trees on the lower parts of a steep slope, and then falling the top row of trees to topple the lower ones, domino-fashion. When the sawmiller's workers objected to the danger, the hero admonished

them: ‘You bet it’s dangerous for amateurs. But we’re not amateurs. You’re men, not kids. You’re used to tall timbers. Every time you fell a tree death stands at your elbow. You don’t complain about that, do you? Because it’s your job’.<sup>12</sup>

When timber workers took risks like these, there was a strong connection made between their masculinity, their manual work and their personal self-esteem. Such risks left these workers with a sense of achievement whose currency was valid in that traditional male domain—the pub—for many years to come. Old Fred Cooper, fond of spinning a yarn any time, recounted one such episode:

Well there are times, people, such as myself now, who do stupid things. When they started to expand this place over here, they had 37 foot green poles, they’re dried out now, those poles are still over there, they’re 37 foot long, and they’re ten inches at the head, that’s the small end. They had to go up in one piece. It would have cost the firm \$360 an hour to get a heavy crane with a long jib from ... Tamworth ...

I was driving a mobile crane at the time and they asked me if I’d have a go at putting those poles up. I said, ‘Yes, I’ll try it’. Now, they had a twenty five foot wooden pole strapped on to an eighteen foot jib on a mobile crane with a pully block on the end of it. Just a single wire rope fixed on the crane. I put those poles up, just on ordinary wages. I had that rigged up and on front of it, it was an old ... Ford Blitz ... On the front of it, I had two four by fours of hardwood ... placed along under the front edge ... a two ton block of cement out on those [chuckles] four by fours to keep the nose of it down. I put those things up and if ever the Department of Labour and Industry had a caught up with me, I’d been still going. [chuckles]

Now to put those poles up, it would have cost thousands of dollars, whereas it cost them two weeks wages for me,

just ordinary wages ... They're still up there. Those on the far side there, they're 37 foot long. I put those up there with just an ordinary little mobile crane and a three and a half ton Ford Blitz ... Well you do these things and then to look back on it now, I often think, how damn stupid can you get. Just to prove that it can be done otherwise, without the big heavy fancy gear.

## **Practical knowledge**

Whilst most of the work in the timber industry was outdoors or on the shopfloor, the intellectual division of labour—the division between mental and manual work—was always present. It played a major role in reinforcing social relations of power and privilege. And with that went all the indignities that workers endured from their bosses. As Doug Edwards put it:

Big company like Carricks, we was only a number on their list, that's all it amounted to them. They come down there, they'd talk to [the manager]. Only time they'd come and talk to us, any of the bosses. I don't care about any of them. If they didn't want to find out something off us, they wouldn't even look at us. But by gee, if they wanted to find out something, we was good enough to talk to then. A lot of things up there ... we were just treated as workers. That was all we were.

Workers in the Forestry Commission suffered similar indignities. There was a sharp division between foresters and workers, a distinction based on certificates and diplomas. Peter Philips, a retired forestry foreman from Murwillumbah, recalled being evicted from his forest cottage and assigned to live in some run-down barracks so that visiting foresters could have the use of the more comfortable quarters. Even in retirement, Peter's outrage at

the various inequalities of rank that marked his working life still burned:

There was a long long time before we got any camping allowance. Which was always a sore point with me. Even when we got it, it was much lower than the foresters. I used to say to them, 'What are you fellows? You eat the same tucker as us, I've seen youse eating it', I said. 'And you've got a better accommodation here than what we've got. So where's the justice in the thing?'

For the older generation of foresters who had sat for public service forestry exams, their careers could be cut short by lack of university qualifications.<sup>13</sup> Grafton forester Colin Greeves noted sadly how his career had stalled at the district level because he lacked the right 'piece of paper'. In the Forestry Commission, the knowledge which was legitimised was theoretical knowledge: knowledge acquired at a remote location and knowledge based on book learning. It was common for forestry workers to recount stories of young university trained foresters arriving in the 'real world of the bush' with knowledge that was useless. Peter Philips offered some glimpses of this:

I had a few arguments with some of those young fellows. They come out and of course, I maintained that they were given the wrong training. If they were going to be foresters in charge of logging operations, marketing operations, that they should be taught what kinds of trees. 'What's that tree?' ... They'd come out and they'd have to ask me. I said to one chap one day, I said, 'You're getting a bloody lot more money than me'. I said, 'You find out.' He got very niggly about it. [Laughs] But by and large they were reasonably good. You'd just get that odd fellow that'd stick his nose in the air a bit and think, 'Well I'm above these chaps, I've got a diploma of forestry science' or whatever

they get ... Some learnt very quick; others were so dense you'd nearly have to drive it into them with a hammer.

As this last phrase makes clear, it was the foresters who were meant to learn from the workers. Bill Longworth delighted in recounting:

I heard one fellow say at a send off one night, one of our old foremen, one time, he got up and made a speech and he maintained that the foresters learnt more from the men than the men learnt from the foresters. [Quiet laugh]  
Could have heard a pin drop for a while.

Invariably the point of comparison for workers like Bill was their own practical knowledge:

Some of the younger blokes [foresters] are quite good. Some of them are a little bit brash ... They tend to think that the bloke in the bush, like meself and our other workers ... you're a Section 10 employee, and that's it. They don't tend to listen ... They go to university and they learn the botanical names [but] ... it's not much great use to them in practical terms ... Building bridges. We don't always have engineers. Dozens of us blokes can turn around and put a bridge across a creek out in the bush. Build it and build it quite good ... Years of experience. And young foresters don't know it.

For timber workers who had to deal with these young foresters out in the bush, the story was essentially the same. When Doug Edwards and Will Connelly recounted their experiences, their contempt was barely disguised:

*Will Connelly:* A lot of the trouble here now with the forestry is all these young fellows coming on in the forestry. Like young students and that coming out and running the forestry. They think they can do the work in the office, like to run the bush without going in the bush. Well that's a thing you can't do.

*Doug Edwards:* You've got to have practical experience.

*Will Connelly:* In the bush, you don't know what's going to happen from today to tomorrow ... you just can't run it like that.

*Doug Edwards:* The trouble is though, mate, that with the whole lot of these young students ... they come out and they think they're going to learn it all in a few weeks and be able to come up to you and say, 'Look you do this, you do that. I know. I just know because I come out of college.' We've had a lot of arguments with blokes come up here ... half them never even seen a log put over a saw to see what it's gonna cut up like. We've been in the bush all our life ... They think ... a log's gonna roll there. They've got a pencil and they practice on the desk down there. Just because it'll roll straight they think it's gonna roll straight out here on uneven ground too, like that.

*Will Connelly:* Well they read it. They read it.

These sentiments reflect the almost timeless dismissal of youth by their elders, of theory by practitioners. In the 1970s this attitude took on a more precise form when younger university-trained foresters with sympathies for conservation found themselves posted to district offices on the north coast. The local timber workers and forestry workers were then confronted by a combination of elements which was bound to offend them. Steve Williams, a retired logger now in his seventies, saw many foresters come and go:

A lot of those new foresters come from Canberra and they have it drilled into them over there that the average bushman is ruining the forests. That's not so. I know that's not so at all ... I think it's drilled into them. When they come out here, they get that officious, they think they own everything around [inaudible] ... they speak as if they practically own it, you know ...

They all come from the universities now. Years ago there used to be, you'd have a forester and all the rest of his foremen and crew were local fellows that grew up around here, see. But now, the biggest part of those foresters, district foresters and all that, they're Canberra men and they all seem to be on the one boat. They seem to think everything should be preserved and shouldn't be felled out ... Some of them are a bit different. Some of the older hands are a bit different, but the newer chaps ...

Forestry foreman, Burt Jenkins, commented succinctly about his former boss, a young forester: 'he's in the National Parks and Wildlife now. He wasn't cut out to be a forester. He was very conservationist'.

However, the real challenge to the 'old hands' in the timber industry came not from the young foresters, but from the increasingly large numbers of city 'exiles' who moved to the north coast during the 1970s. These new settlers became involved in a series of anti-forestry campaigns all along the coast, from north of Newcastle to the Queensland Border. The impact of these conservation battles, particularly the blockade of Terania Creek, was profound within timber worker communities. In essence, the arrival of conservation politics on the north coast brought home a series of sharp social antagonisms: working class versus middle class; market forces versus government intervention; the country versus the city; and, of great significance, practical knowledge versus theoretical knowledge.

## **The city and the country**

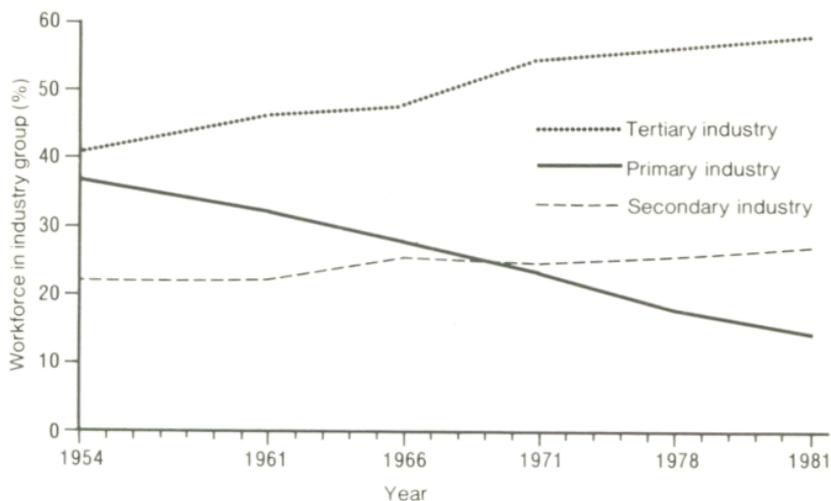
The 'bush' is a much burdened carrier of meaning. Within rural language generally it refers to the country as distinct from the city, particularly the perceived superiority of rural values and lifestyles. When New Right forces mobilised in rural communities against

the Hawke Labor Government during 1985 they repeatedly used the 'bush' in this strong sense. For timber workers, the 'bush' had an added layer of meaning: it denoted their world of work. In daily usage, timber workers used words like 'bush', 'scrub' and 'brush' for this domain. It was only city people who talked about 'forests' and 'rainforests'. A strong sense of city versus country infused timber worker language, contributing to the formation of a 'productivist perspective' which highly valued the production of material commodities and contemptuously dismissed both the service sector of the economy and the role of government.

Historically, the north coast region had passed through several phases of economic growth and decline but from the 1950s onwards, a distinctive pattern began to emerge. Employment in primary industry declined sharply, secondary industry remained static and the tertiary sector expanded dramatically (see Figure 3.1). For the local population, these changes were experienced as a continuing decline in dairying and timber work, and an explosion in tourism and the retirement industry. This decline mostly took place in the rural hinterland while the growth occurred along the seaboard. Consequently, the division between city and country was not simply a distinction between Sydney and the bush but was increasingly reproduced within the immediate geography of the north coast as a sharp contrast between the hinterland and the seaboard.

Nowhere was the contraction of distance more apparent than in the relationship between Wauchope and Port Macquarie. Though separated by a mere 20 kilometres, these two towns epitomised this reproduction of city versus country. In terms of employment, income and general business activity, Port Macquarie expanded dramatically, while Wauchope steadily declined. Residents of Wauchope watched as their local businesses relocated in Port Macquarie, taking with them employment and other spin-offs.

Figure 3.1: Changes in workforce structure: north coast region  
1954–1981



Source: For 1954 to 1971, taken from R.G. Munro, R.W. Gibberd and P.A. Jelliffe *North Coast Region—Economic Structure, Problems and Prospects* Lismore: Research Unit, N.R.C.A.E., 1977, p. 10. For 1976 and 1981, ABS *Census of Population and Housing*.

Port Macquarie itself increasingly took on the air of a sophisticated urban centre. Port Macquarie children, born to professional middle-class parents, spoke disdainfully of the ‘hillbilly’ children in Wauchope while traditional rural values in Wauchope were affronted by the ‘decadence’ of Port Macquarie. This polarisation was evident elsewhere on the north coast, for example in the extreme contrast between Murwillumbah and Tweed Heads. In each instance, the cultural contrast was accompanied by economic changes in which a declining primary centre faced a developing tertiary centre.

Log faller Andy Johnson, a part-time dairy farmer, explained why he thought a tertiary industry like tourism was not comparable to the primary and secondary sectors:

As far as I'm concerned, tourism ... it's not, well righto it might be a growth industry, but, someone has got to make a quid before they can be a tourist and what do you make your money at? Producing things! Whether it be for local production or overseas production, and if you're not producing timber or mining or fabricating something, take Newcastle for instance, they make their steel and that, well you're losing there, no one's working in the bush ...

And Betty Hicks, an ex-dairy farmer who had been re-trenched from the Yarras mill, offered a similar view. As she put it:

I think they're concentrating on tourists too much instead of ordinary working men. [Inaudible] make his living. Which was all our forefathers could do, there was nothing else. You can't make a living with tourists like you can in the timber industry...

The distinction drawn between 'productive' and 'unproductive' activities was not only a response to the strong growth in tertiary industries like tourism. It was also enhanced by the increasing arrival of new settlers on the north coast (see Figure 3.2).

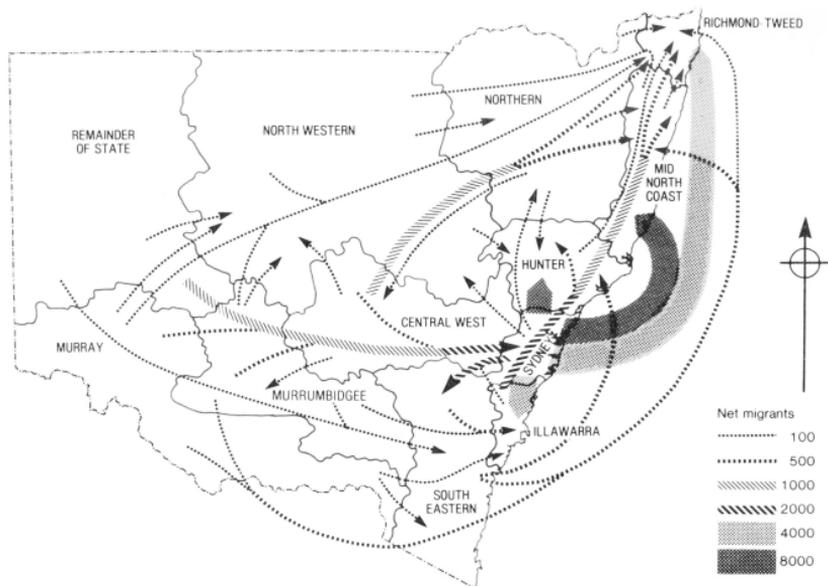
Many of the newcomers were from large cities, and the farms they bought were mostly failed dairy farms on the outskirts of large regional centres like Lismore. While many of these new settlers pursued mainstream occupations (particularly professional careers), a large proportion became alternative lifestyle settlers and engaged in a diverse range of activities and lifestyles. The new settlers have been categorised by one researcher as composed of:

- ◁ musos (musicians)
- ◁ gurus (charismatic leaders in alternative communities)
- ◁ part-time landsharers or middle-class hippies (still working in mainstream jobs)
- ◁ droogs (itinerant hippies who bludge on the locals)
- ◁ cosemics (people who direct their lives according to astrology)
- ◁ artists and craft people
- ◁ subsistence hamlet developers (the backbone of the new settler movement).<sup>14</sup>

Despite these internal differences, for many of the local timber workers and farmers, the new settlers remained ‘dole-bludging hippies’. In the eyes of the locals, the new settler migration provided stark evidence for the intrusion of unproductive values into their midst. Many of the new settlers did not follow traditional land use practices, nor did they engage in profit-maximising farming. Both anomalies were regarded as evidence of ‘wasting the land’. In addition, many of the new settlers relied on social security payments and thus fitted into the category of unproductive ‘bludgers’.<sup>15</sup>

Many of the new settlers were highly educated<sup>16</sup> and articulate—and thus the embodiment of theoretical knowledge. Often their practical farming skills were rudimentary or non-existent,<sup>17</sup> and this invited contempt from their traditional neighbours. The new settlers’ reliance on social security was also an affront to the masculinity of working class communities. Andrew Tolson has suggested that: ‘For the male wage-labourer, the threat of redundancy is a humiliation ... for over and above its sheer economic necessity, the experience of working is at the centre of a man’s social life. The wage, which redundancy removes, is much more than an economic “wager” ... (in the pub, or in the family) the wage

Figure 3.2: Net intrastate migration, NSW 1976–1981



Source: NSW Department of Environment and Planning, *Internal Migration: an exploration of NSW trends since 1970*. Sydney: NSW Government Printer, 1985

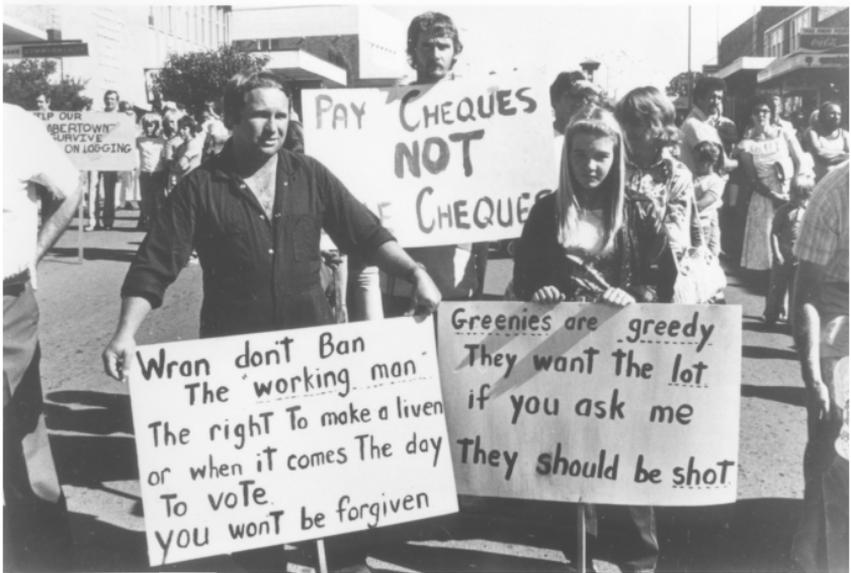
symbolises a man's "social presence".<sup>18</sup> In traditional rural communities, the new settlers represented a clash of masculinities. Not only did the men often wear long hair and colourful clothes, but they did not define their masculinity in terms of wage-labour dependency. They appeared to be at ease living on social security benefits and thereby lacked the 'dignity of manhood' demanded by the productivist perspective.

As well as highlighting major social contradictions, the arrival of new settlers also aroused that traditional rural disdain felt toward newcomers. Doug Edwards had seen the valleys around Kyogle re-populate with new settlers and he didn't like it:

There's that much difference between reared in the bush and reared in the city ... You send someone from the city up here to try and settle into these sort of places, well he's got a bloody battle in front of him, I'll tell ya. I know what it's like for us to go to the city ... My family ... they all left here and went to the city. I go down there and they're different kids altogether from what I thought they'd be ... They're in with the crew down there. You walk past a bloke down there, they don't talk to him, they don't know their next door neighbour, they won't speak to one another ... We're that used to talking to everyone here. And all friendly.

But now these ones that are coming in ... They just don't seem to be able to mix in with the country people ... They don't work, they grow marijuana ... We go into town now or up these creeks here and there's only a few that we do know. The old crew's dying out and all this new crew that's coming in, they don't mix. We just don't know who they are.

Particularly in those villages which were radically transformed by the waves of new settlers, this sense of loss mingled with contempt for new settler lifestyles. Log haulier, Robbie Fellows,



For timber workers, the term 'working class' was not used to distinguish between themselves and the bosses, but to contrast themselves with the 'dole bludging hippies'. Pro-logging demonstration in Wauchope 8 May 1982. (Photo by courtesy of the *Hastings Gazette*.)

reflected on how Nimbin, his home town, had been transformed by the 'hippie' influx:

You call them new settlers, we call them hippies. Because I hate seeing people dirty for a start. It doesn't cost you much to have a bath and keep clean. Nimbin was a really nice little town once. Like from when I was going to school, every farm at Nimbin ... had a family on it ... All the shops in Nimbin were really flourishing ... the butter factory was going. There was two or three sawmills in the area.

Saturday nights for instance ... you went to the pictures ... Everybody knew everybody else. You could go anywhere. If you broke down anywhere, you'd get picked

up, you know. You wouldn't walk ten yards along the road then and somebody'd come along the road and pick you up ... But now, you go to Nimbin now, you see a woman and a kid walking along the road today, you just drive straight past them. You don't bother picking them up, nobody does. Unless it's a hippie type person that comes along, well they pick their hippie type people up.

Well like it really gets me. They reckon the straights and the hippies have sort of got on well together, but it's all nonsense ... It's definitely two separate groups. And it'll never get any better ... You go down the Nimbin street now and you think it's a pigsty ... It's declined quite a bit, Nimbin, to what it used to be.

At the height of the rainforest controversy, State politicians made several visits to the north coast. Among the banners greeting a delegation of politicians at Casino airport were: 'Wran King of the Hippies', 'We want jobs, not hippy slobs', and 'Responsible government for responsible people'. During the Terania Creek protests these long time residents formed their own group (the Concerned Channon Residents) to oppose the protesters, and the Chairperson summed up his feelings in the following way:

They've come into the village. They've more or less taken over most of the village. And we just don't think that that should go on. We were people that were born and bred here and we're not quite happy to be taken over by someone that's just come along ... Especially the way they dress. The way they clean themselves, they come down in any condition. Not worried if they're hurting anybody else. Their children are quite naked a lot of the times. They've got no clothes. And we're not used to that ... <sup>19</sup>

After the Terania Creek blockade, when timber workers found to their amazement that they were now shut out of their traditional

domain by the newcomers, this contempt for the ‘dole-bludging hippies’ reached a new intensity. Log faller, Andy Johnson, could barely stay seated as he exclaimed:

Well, they're lepers. They're leeches; they're living off the community and contributing nothing, and no country, no economy can stand that forever. Righto, they're living in that country up there, half of them don't pay rates ... They're not contributing anything ... they're getting the dole. They might be selling a bit of weed somewhere on the side in Sydney and Newcastle somewhere. They say they're subsistence farmers. They're still getting the dole! So how, and they're the kind of people that are trying to stop you from cutting down trees and making an honest living ... That's the kind of person that's doing it ...

What was your feeling at the time when that was happening at Terania Creek with the demonstrations and that? [Interviewer]

They want fucking well knocking out of the trees and kicking the arse and sending. Cause they, oh!

## **The working class and job security**

Working-class existence is precarious at the best of times. Unable to accumulate sufficient capital to break free from wage labour, workers face continuing vulnerability to the fluctuations of the labour market. The insecurity of working-class life emerged constantly in my interviews with timber workers. As manual labourers there was no career structure that guaranteed increased earning power with age. Indeed, one timber worker noted with bitterness his relegation from number one benchman to yard labourer as he grew too old for the task. This decline in income and status was something unique to manual labouring; unless workers escaped

into office work or supervisory tasks, as their bodies grew frail their job prospects declined.

British studies suggest that, for the manual working class, the concept of a 'career' is alien.<sup>20</sup> Workers are more concerned to get a 'job', because everyone needs a job to survive and there is little real variation between the kinds of jobs which unskilled workers enter. There is no expectation by manual workers that their job should provide 'career opportunities' or personal fulfilment. Particularly for timber workers in depressed rural economies, a job really was just a job. As Alice Young, who'd been retrenched from the local plymill once before, was quick to affirm:

Well, things have got better yes. But I've never complained ... The conditions, they're hot and that sort of thing and I've worked hard too, when I first started. Now I'm getting things easier. No, I've always been pleased to work here. Very very pleased to have a job. And that's all I can say.

Rhonda Myles, retrenched from the Yarras plymill but never re-employed, looked back with mixed feelings:

To be honest with you, if it started up tomorrow I don't think I'd go back to working in the mill. Because it was hard and heavy work for anybody, man or woman. It's not easy work. But had it have not closed down I'd have gone on happily till I was 60 I suppose. That's the way it would have been. You've got something to do. You've got a job to go to, you've got a wage coming in, so you just go along.

The vulnerability of working class jobs was felt most acutely when retrenchments occurred. Retrenched timber workers, like Neville Hicks, recounted the experience of visiting the local Commonwealth Employment Service office:

I've had interviews about jobs since [the mill closed] but they've got that many younger people with families out of

work that they're selecting them before the older people that haven't got a family. As soon as I tell them I'm 50 or 51 years old, 'I'm sorry, there's 30 or 40 ahead of you'. And that's just the way it goes.

Laurie Douglas had watched two of his brothers retrenched from local timber mills. He offered the following sober assessment of the prospects they and their mates faced:

I know some of them spend a lot of time at the hotel, which they can't afford. You know, I don't know what you'd call it but it's just, they've sort of ... got no future. They've got no job, and when they first went on it, they didn't mind. They thought, oh, they'd exist, but then, they'll admit now they'd do anything ... to have a job ... But, see some of them know nothing else but sawmilling and there's just nothing about.

Even for those workers whose skills, expertise or specialised knowledge guaranteed them continued employment into their sixties, the insecurity of working class life did not disappear. A constant complaint throughout the interviews amongst many older workers was the absence of 'super' (superannuation) in their industry. At most they could count on their long service leave: otherwise it was just the pension and their savings.

Timber workers invariably contrasted their economic vulnerability with the security of tertiary employment, particularly office work or government jobs. Rhonda Myles recounted the following conversation she'd had with her son:

Steve said to me when he left school he didn't just want to have a job like dad had, a labourer's job where he worked for 20 years and then be told that he's finished. He said he wanted something that had a future to it. That's his way of looking at things. 'I don't want just any job, any labourer's job'. Whether it's an office job or what, he said he wants

something that he feels is secure where he's got a future to look forward to. He said, 'I don't want to end up like you and dad did'.

A similar contrast between the vulnerability inherent in manual labour and the security found in mental work was built into the hierarchy of the Forestry Commission. As foreman Burt Jenkins noted bitterly:

It's not like a foreman on the main roads, foreman in the forestry works. He's just another navvy. We weren't public servants, we're Section 10, and we got no super, like the clerks in the office. They're public servants, they got their super. Foresters got their super. We had nothing. All we had to look forward to when we retired was if you saved your long service leave ... We were Section 10, we were just classed as labourers.

For many timber fallers government employment contrasted strongly with their own jobs. Government jobs offered security, but were also despised as unproductive because they were not 'hard work'. As Mike O'Farrell commented:

One chap said the other day that, it'd be the worst thing that could ever happen. [A proposal that log fallers should work for the Forestry Commission rather than for the sawmills]. They'd have you having flexi days once a fortnight. [Laughs]. Or they wouldn't allow you to work on public holidays and that sort of thing.

And Robbie Fellows was insistent about the contrast when asked if contracting was a good way to work:

Oh I think so. I think it's a real good idea. Actually I think everybody should be on contract cause at least you've got to work then. You know, you've got to produce your article to get your money. It's a pretty sore point with me

actually. You can see so many jobs that get around that could be done with a lot less people and people get paid for it, so.

What areas are you thinking of there? [Interviewer]

Oh ... what they do on roads. Public buildings and this sort of thing ... We've lived alright. But we've made no fortune. But then we've done a lot of hours for it, too. Like when we were working from Bonalba out here back to Lismore, well it's an 85 mile haul one way. We leave at 2 o'clock in the morning and finish at about 4 or 5 in the afternoon. So it's a pretty long day. Like if we were working for a government department or somebody else and getting paid penalty rates and overtime, we'd be making a fortune. [Laughs].

When conservation politics arrived on the north coast, so too did the threat of a new wave of redundancies. Insulated by their middle-class security, many new settler conservationists could not appreciate the world of economic insecurity into which they had migrated. When Rhonda Myles recounted the visit of some conservationists to her mill, their remoteness from the reality of working-class survival was evident:

How can you walk into a place like this and say to 80 people, 'We're going to close the mill down but you're not going to lose your job'. Now, you know, [laughs] it's just not on. Nobody could be that silly surely. But that's what they said, 'None of youse will lose your job, you'll all have your jobs'. You know, 'There's gonna be bushwalks, there's gonna be tourism. Tourism's the answer' ... We laughed at them. You cannot talk to those sort of people. They will not listen, they just talk you down, they talk over the top of you like you're nothing. That's the way they operate.

## Conclusion

Studies of working-class culture have suggested that the attitude of manual workers to formal education is often contradictory. As the examples of timber workers in this chapter has shown, the identification of masculinity with manual labour produced contempt for mental labour and for formal education. Yet other research suggests that there is a recognition by the manual working class that formal education can be valuable for releasing human potential. Through the use of in-depth case studies, American sociologists Richard Sennett and Johnathon Cobb explored this contradictory relationship between the working class and formal education. Sennett and Cobb argued that workers were deeply aware of ‘the hidden injuries of class’—the denial to them of the capacity to develop their human powers to their fullest extent. Formal education served as a ‘badge of ability’—the way the middle class could show that they had ‘made it’. In this way, formal education served to legitimise the inequalities of class power which manual workers constantly endure.

In a society as individualistic as that of the United States, meritocratic sentiments—like the notion that the ‘best’ should come out on top— play a particularly important part in justifying class inequality. For manual workers in particular, the ‘badge of ability’ is more than just the ‘bit of paper’ that smooths the ride to the top; it is also a source of injury because it is symbolic of the way in which workers have been denied the chance to develop their full potential. Sennett and Cobb draw this complex argument together very neatly in one of their case studies. Speaking of the working-class male, Rissarro’s, attitude towards education, they conclude:

Educated men can control themselves and stand out from the mass of people ruled by passions at the bottom of society; that badge of ability earns the educated dignity in

Rissarro's eyes. Yet the content of their power—the ability considered in essence rather than in relation to his personal background and memories—this he finds a sham, and repugnant. Still, the power of the educated to judge him, and more generally, to rule, he does not dispute. He accepts as legitimate what he believes is undignified in itself, and in accepting the power of educated people he feels more inadequate, vulnerable, and undignified.

The feelings he, and the other men and women we encountered, have about power in relation to their own freedom and dignity, demand some kind of fresh explanation. All these people feel society has limited their freedom more than it has limited that of middle-class people—by which they mean society has limited their freedom to develop powers inside themselves, not just restricted to how much money they can make—but they are not rebellious in the ordinary sense of the word; they are both angry and ambivalent about their right to be angry.<sup>21</sup>

In the case of the timber workers, a similar contradiction surfaced in their attitudes towards security and material production. For these workers, manual work and the production of material commodities was inherently satisfying: at the end of the day there was concrete evidence that the work had been done. By contrast, office work, much service activity and most government jobs seemed to offer no visible product, a major reason why they were deemed unproductive. Yet the irony remained: government jobs and office work offered security, labouring represented a dead-end working life.

An even more extreme contrast was drawn between materially productive work and living on welfare payments. Sennett and Cobb also found that the traditional working class maintained a deep hostility toward what Americans call 'welfare chisellers'. This was a complex combination of envy and resentment.<sup>22</sup> A similar

attitude existed amongst rural workers on the north coast and it regularly surfaced amongst timber workers in their outbursts against 'dole-bludging hippies'.

Consequently these contrasts regularly infused the language of timber workers throughout the rainforest controversy. As they saw it, their livelihoods were jeopardised by conservationists who lived on welfare payments. The term 'working class' was absent from the timber workers' vocabulary as a term of contrast between bosses and workers. In this sense, they showed little evidence of what some Marxists call 'class consciousness'. Yet throughout the rainforest controversy, allusions to the 'working man' were constantly made by the timber workers in their public campaigns. However, when they used the term, it was not the bosses whom they had in mind, but the 'bludging hippies'. In Rhonda Myles's words:

The way I look at it is, they think, 'Well righto, my father's got plenty of money and he's giving me so much a week, so I can do ... my thing whether I'm a greenie or what I am.' They can spend their time concentrating on doing that particular thing. Like, as I say, if you're an ordinary worker like we were, you haven't got time, seven days a week stirring up mischief. You've got a job to do, you've got a job to go to, so you go to that job ... As far as these demonstrations ... they put on ... they've got nothing else to do. Well I mean they couldn't put all the time ... like save the seals and all this sort of crap if they had a day's work to go to, could they?

In many of my other interviews, similar sentiments occurred. The phrases 'working people' or 'working for a living' were often used when timber workers drew a comparison between themselves and the conservationists. They were never used to denote an opposition between themselves and the bosses. Instead, the adversaries

of the timber workers had increasingly spread out along a spectrum from parasitic service industries and an unproductive government sector through to the far extreme, the 'bludging hippies'.

## CHAPTER 4

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### 'It's just a wilful waste': timber workers, nature and history

Nature is a material world, but our concepts of nature are always socially constructed. The British cultural theorist, Raymond Williams, has convincingly argued that the concept of nature has, over time, held many different meanings and suggested quite diverse associations. As he put it: 'the idea of nature contains, though often unnoticed, an extraordinary amount of human history'.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Steven Cotgrove has argued that: 'any appeal to some notion of nature as an external reality in order to justify a particular relationship between men and nature fails to recognise that images of nature are human constructions, historically and socially conditioned'.<sup>2</sup>

#### **The construction of 'nature'**

The way in which timber workers constructed 'nature' was profoundly shaped by their immediate working lives. Mike O'Farrell, a log faller from Grafton with whom I spent a day in the bush, dismissed the small plants and shrubs at the base of trees as 'rubbish'. For Mike these plants were just an impediment because they

had no commercial value and they decreased his safety margin by blocking escape from the base of the tree when it fell. Later Mike gave me his judgement on the different kinds of forests he had worked in and he distinguished sharply between undulating coastal country and the mountainous hinterland, as well as between open forest and rainforest canopy. Mike viewed each landscape in the light of his labour process, in terms of things like safety and exertion. Coastal forest would give a log faller a longer working life in the bush because there were fewer steep slopes to climb carrying heavy logging equipment. Tree falling in rainforest areas was more dangerous than working in open forest because the network of vines in the rainforest canopy could pull down branches in unforeseen ways.

‘Nature’ was not only a concept in the timber workers’ language and imagery, it also shaped their daily habits. One north coast forester recalled one strange effect produced by camping and working in the rainforests: ‘Living in the semi-gloom we all went pale. People in Kyogle could pick out rainforest workers in the street by their pale faces and the way they walked head down—a habit from watching for roots, vines and stones’.<sup>3</sup>

In the last chapter I suggested that the contract payment system promoted strong attitudes of competitive individualism. This system was also responsible for reinforcing a productivist perspective amongst log fallers. Because nature was the terrain on which they made their living, nature needed to be productive. This lay behind Mike O’Farrell’s condemnation of the State government for ‘locking up’ the forests:

Washpool's a mature forest. If it's not cut within the next—well it won't be cut now. If they had a cut it now, within the next 30, 40 years the logs would have been matured, somebody would have got some good out of

them whereas as it is now they'll be left there, they'll fall down with old age and nobody'll get anything out of them. It's just a wilful waste ... I feel it's a waste of good country to have a place like that locked up when it could be roaded and made some use of.

The timber workers' world of work also shaped their overall aesthetic appreciation of the bush. Many workers descriptions of scenes of wildlife in the bush were full of praise for natural beauty. Yet the context of these descriptions always tied back into their labour process: it was the logging itself, or the construction of a road, which flushed out the wildlife and gave the workers the opportunity to appreciate it. Similarly, stories of the efforts made by log fallers to protect wildlife were common in timber communities:

A log-cutter and a tractor-driver ... had cut down a beautiful Tallow Wood and were about to hook the tractor onto it when they heard the most unearthly mournful sound. On searching around they discovered that they had disturbed a lyrebird's nest ... It was obvious that they could not haul the log out without destroying the nest ... so they spent half a day moving the log into a position from which it could be hauled without harming the nest and the chick.<sup>4</sup>

Once forest conservation became a controversial issue during the 1970s, the public perception of timber workers began to change. No longer the romantic axeman, log fallers increasingly found themselves portrayed as 'forest butchers'. The conservationists printed numerous posters and leaflets in which forestry operations were equated with scenes of devastation. In their defence, timber workers argued that they were the *true* conservationists while foresters pointed out that they were the *first* conservationists. Both groups saw themselves as sensitive people, fully able to appreciate the beauty of flora and fauna, and not the simpletons depicted in the cartoons used in conservationist leaflets.

To maintain this defence, timber workers constructed an image of nature which directly challenged the slur of 'forest butcher'. In particular, timber workers insisted that the forests were immense and that trees regrew after logging. This attitude was defended by drawing on personal experiences and also family history—a useful way to show just how far back their relationship with the bush extended. Rhonda Myles, for example, drew on her family's long involvement in the timber industry to defend the regrowth argument:

You come out here and you have a look around and there's just thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands ... of trees. It's just hard to believe that people could have the ideas that they have about it as far as wiping out the trees. And they say that they don't regenerate. They do. My grandfather had a mill over here in Ellenborough only about ten miles from here when I was a young girl. We lived over there ... near the mill.

And about... three years ago we went for a drive back out one Sunday, just curiosity to have a look. And do you know, it is so hard to find where that mill was that it's not funny ... Only that I knew it was there ... I wouldn't have found it ... there is a couple of big wheel things there on the ground to tell you that that's where the mill was. It's just all grown up again. It's just bush again, scrub again ... But they say that it doesn't, you know once you take the trees, that's it, they're finished, which is a heap of rubbish. It's not true at all.

Neville Hicks, retrenched from the same mill as Rhonda, had been unemployed for over three years. Much of his time was spent in the garden—a useful source of food for the family, and a source of metaphors for the 'regrowth' defence:

The conservationists had a lot of city people on their side because they used a lot of publications and worked on

speeches and so forth. And I think a lot of city people got the idea that if the mills kept going, there wouldn't be a tree growing. But there's a terrific amount of timber that's not milled, therefore it'll be there for a long time. Such as around this area here ... There's still a stack of bush around ... It's the same as if you're growing flowers and vegetables in a garden. If you plant them thick they seem to take a fair while to grow but if you thin them out, then they grow quicker and a lot better. That's my idea of what should happen to rainforest too. They should be thinned out a bit. If they're going to close it down ... the youngest stuff under the big stuff will just go spindling, no use for nothing.

**Mike O'Farrell**, in voicing the familiar theme of 'conservationist ignorance', also drew on his family's history in the industry:

Do [the conservationists] ever come and see what goes on? They don't know what goes on. They haven't worked in the industry, they don't know what goes on. Somebody probably told them they clearfell it and it looks like an aerodrome. There's areas that I've logged three times in my life in 40 years and I can take you there today and there's better trees there today than what was there 40 years ago ... This area dad logged through ... in 1938 ... I've been through it twice since ... all the parliamentarians all went there and looked at it when those tours were on. Nobody knew it had been logged yet. All wandering around saying how good the forest looked. [Half laughs] That proves, you know, it regrows. Something you can't kill. Only way you can kill it is cut it down, push it down, burn it, and start a farm on it. That's the only way you can stop it.

None of these responses arose in isolation. There was much material within rural communities from which timber workers

could fashion their imagery of nature. As well as conversations in the pub with fellow workers and neighbours, timber workers were exposed to a local press which regularly featured the views of the Associated Country Sawmillers (ACS) and the Forestry Commission on issues of forest management. The often voiced claims that logged areas would regenerate and that the forests would last forever, were important elements in the ACS media campaign, 'Let the Light Shine Through'.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the failure to distinguish between any regrowth and the restoration of the full ecological diversity of the former forest reflected not simply a lack of scientific training. It was also a product of the sawmillers' propaganda which stressed only the wood production values of the forests.

However, the important thing about the images of nature which I have quoted is that they draw heavily on the raw material of rural working-class life: the daily personal experiences of working in the bush, family history and its attendant folklore, the concrete presence of their immediate surroundings, and the rhythms of rural growth and regeneration.

In the eyes of timber workers, conservationists lacked this working intimacy with the bush and their imagery of nature was seen as theoretical and remote. Fred Cooper lost his job when the Yarras mill closed. Sitting on the front porch of his old timber cottage, Fred reflected:

Well what you read from them [conservationists] is more or less something that they've read themselves because their experience comes out of a book in an office desk in Sydney. Not experience. Not practical experience. That's the way it works isn't it? I mean you take some of them fellows out in the bush, places where we've been, blindfold them, turn them round twice and say, 'Head for home', and they wouldn't know which way to go. They'd be lost, they wouldn't find their way out of the bush.

Timber workers would tell stories of visits to the city where they were subjected to ear bashings from ill-informed city dwellers who had picked up second-hand accounts of the 'rape' of the forests. Bill Longworth recounted an episode which occurred on a recent visit to the city:

You know, I've got nieces in Sydney, oh, give me the biggest ear bashing under the sun about what they're doing to the forests up on the north coast. 'Scandalous'. 'Who told you that?' 'Oh, went to a lecture the other night'. And you know, it's completely wrong. The full facts are not fed to the public. I'm not saying all conservationists are like that but, it does happen for sure.

Jock Wright, nearing retirement but still personally running his small sawmill, met a similar reception on a visit to Sydney. But he gave as much as he took:

I had a son had a business there at Manly ... I was in there and an old chap come in and he introduced me to him ... 'This is dad,' he said, 'He's got a mill up there'. Of course, the old fellow fastened on to me quick and lively, 'Oh, yeah, he's got a sawmill. Is that true up there that you fellows are cutting out all that cedar up there?' I said, well I said, 'You're about 60 or 70 years too late. [Laughs] It wasn't in my time we cut it out'.

At stake in these rival images of nature were rival forms of knowledge. Timber workers regularly contrasted their practical knowledge of nature which was based on actually living and working in the bush, with the knowledge of outsiders, which they saw as based on watching the media, reading books or listening to hearsay. Many timber workers recounted stories about the ignorance of conservationists and conservation-minded tourists. Bill Longworth could draw upon extensive personal experience to highlight the second-hand knowledge of his adversaries:

I get a bit jack of some bloke coming along and saying, 'You shouldn't be cutting this tree down, you shouldn't be cutting that tree down' ... I've seen ... big old stumps there that was felled back in my grandfather's day [that's] got great trees like that growing fair up the middle of it. So it's a renewable resource. So when they start telling you, 'Oh you're ruining it', you know, that gets my back up a bit.

I met a bloke from Victoria one day [when] I made a special trip up to a lookout ... to see what it looked like from the eyes of somebody else. See whether I was taking too much out or whether the tree cover looked reasonable. And I'm there looking at this, and this bloke come along and, oh gees, he give me some. He just came past them logging down the road. How it spoilt it. 'It done this and it done that'.

And when he finished, I asked him what he lived in. I said, 'You live in a cave?' 'Oh no'. He sort of back pedalled a little bit. And I said, 'Well you look down through there'. And he's looking down there, 'Yes', he said, 'That's lovely. That's how it should be'.

'Well', I said, 'now you have another close look. There's stumps all under that'. It'd only been logged about ten years before. Bloody hundreds, you could see the stumps once you started really looking for them.

Well he backed off. That sort of bloke, they don't think, and they've probably listened to some lecturer that's got up there that really hasn't had first hand knowledge of it. And it's a renewable resource, this hardwood along this coast. It's a renewable resource and if it's managed right, there's no worry in the world about it. It'll be there forever and a day.

In rejecting conservationist imagery of nature, timber workers were also rejecting the conservationists themselves. As the last

chapter showed, the apparently unproductive lifestyles<sup>6</sup> of the new settlers were particularly offensive to timber workers. Despite some commonality between both groups in their appreciation of nature and of beautiful timber products, the overall perspectives and the modes of expression of the timber workers and the new settlers were worlds apart. The differences were always apparent when the groups confronted each other in the forests. As Bernie Jackson recalled:

They were very well educated people and they could talk the old sawmiller blue and blind. He didn't know what they were saying. They had a big confrontation. They met over in the rainforest near Lismore and they were dumbfounded. The sawmillers [sic] went over in busloads from around here. But they didn't know what the other man was saying ... they didn't understand that language that they were using. We'd never heard the word 'ecology' before these people came. But don't get me wrong. I always felt sorry to see a tree that had grown for 700 years fell in seven minutes with a chain saw. I always felt sad about that.

Most of the timber workers I met regarded themselves as conservationists with a strong affinity for the beauty of the bush. But by the 1970s the language to express that self-perception had been captured by their adversaries. The timber workers responded with their own language, labelling the new comers 'preservationists' and 'greenies'. But the climate in which this battle was fought was one in which their adversaries had increasingly attained dominance.

### **Timber workers and 'popular memory'**

Most conventional empiricist historians see the past as a place and time with its own objective existence and they see the historian's task as 'recovering' that past. By contrast, more radical historians

reject these assumptions and argue that it is the past–present continuum which makes up reality and that historical practice is about the *construction* of the past rather than its recovery. Among this latter category are found the Popular Memory Group, based in Birmingham, England. They have argued: ‘[we] need to expand the idea of historical production well beyond the limits of academic history-writing. We must include all the ways in which a sense of the past is constructed in our society ... [this] much larger process [is called] “the social production of memory”. In this collective production everyone participates, though unequally. Everyone, in this sense, is a historian.’<sup>7</sup>

Popular memory works through two major vehicles: private memories and public representations. Often, within the public representation of the past, there will be a ‘dominant memory’ which reflects the power of dominant groups and institutions in society. But this domination is usually problematic and so we find that the field of public representations: ‘is crossed by competing constructions of the past, often at war with each other. Dominant memory is produced in the course of these struggles and is always open to contestation’.<sup>8</sup>

In constructing their past in a particular way, timber workers on the north coast vigorously contested what had increasingly become a form of ‘dominant memory’. Ironically, this dominant memory was not comparable to capitalist domination in general (the usual assumption with the idea of dominant memory). Rather, conservationist perspectives had developed during the 1970s as an alternative conception of the environment which was at variance with the dominant values of industrial capitalism. However, for the middle class, and particularly within the city-based media, this alternative conception had acquired the force of dominant memory. ‘The ruthless destruction of the planet’ had by the 1980s lost its marginality and become a kind of conventional wisdom amongst

middle-class city dwellers. The 'rape of the forests' catchcry followed in the wake of extensive media coverage of issues like woodchipping, soil erosion and the greenhouse effect. Its global dimension was popularised with the coverage given to tropical rainforest destruction in Asia and in the Amazon basin.

## **Private memories**

Sitting in his lounge room, retrenched mill manager Frank Sawtell outlined for me the poor reputation his industry had acquired. He was bitter that arguments about 'forest destruction' had become so dominant in the public mind and he was angry that the conservationists had gained such a strong control over the media. He then outlined the kind of history he thought should be told:

What we would like to see from people that took an interest in our history and documented it for the future, we would like to see a changed approach to what seems to be good viewing, good reading in this day and age, in virtually pounding the timber man. 'The Rape of the Big Scrub' was an example of, 'We've got the bugger down, let's give him another kick'. That fellow, by distorting the facts got himself a notation for being the best documentary in the country that particular year ... Now that to me is not fair play, that doesn't give the true story, doesn't give what we believe is the fair dinkum experience of where we're to and where we've been.

And I would hope that anybody that is interested enough to document it, can sort of put it in a fashion that, I'm not asking for a reverse of 'The Rape of the Big Scrub' to occur, and put us up on a pedestal, that we were a heap of goody goodies. What I'm asking for is a sort of fair play sort of result and I think that's what we lack. We've drifted into a yellow cake situation that's totally unfair.

In most of my interviews, timber workers contested this dominant memory in two main ways. The first response was to deny outright that the forests had been 'raped' by timber workers. The second response was to acknowledge destruction, but to place it in a distant past.

Because of their intimate knowledge of the bush and their long personal and family involvement with logging, timber workers could argue that the apparent destruction of the forests was illusory. For them, in the long term, the forests recovered. Therefore, conservationists and city dwellers who protested about 'destruction' were basically ignorant because they had neither first-hand knowledge nor long-term experience. Paddy McInnes outlined how this media imagery clashed with his personal experiences:

I don't think they [Sydney people] were aware ... of the way the bush was managed up here. They were shown pictures of ... where trees had been killed by the bushfires, by the intensive heat, and they've had to clearfell it, to transplant. And they showed these stumps where areas had been clearfelled, 'The timber industry's wiping these trees completely out'. You know, 'This is what the timber industry's doing to our bush'. And it's not right.

This bush up here, Middle Brother Mountain out here, they've been logging off it for 90 years and there's still trees on it cause it's managed properly. The timber workers, they didn't want to destroy their bush, they get their living out of it. You know. Like my father, and his father before him. That's all a lot of people, a lot of families in this area, have known is timber. And they look after their bush, even though they're logging it.

When long term destruction was apparent, such as with silted rivers or soil erosion, timber workers would often blame the farmers. Andy Johnson (ironically a small farmer as well as a log faller) offered a typical response:

They're blaming the timber industry for cutting down the trees. It's the farmers that caused all the problems. They cleared the country. Well they had to have farms, had to have cattle, have produce and stuff.

However, since these culprits were sometimes their own ancestors, timber workers would often end their explanations by adding extenuating circumstances. As Andy concluded:

I suppose it wasn't ignorance, it was a matter of survival. You know, your prime aim in the early days was survival. Did you ever read Steel Rudd's book, 'Dad and Dave'? ... If you get a chance to go back and see how the old blokes lived in the bush, that is a good book. That was from bare survival, from coming and knocking up a bit of a hut out of bark and slabs of timber and something and ... getting a living out of a piece of ground. And that was the whole thing in them days. Survival.

For Burt Jenkins, his own family history contained a similar pattern of economic survival and ecological destruction:

I was born and bred on the Tweed out here on the farm that the old man bought after the First World War. I suppose it would have been all ringbarked probably around about 1906. And after the war, I cut a lot of cord wood there and we were falling quite a lot of timber ... big trees, massive big trees with small pipes. Beautiful timber. But there was no use for it in those days... You couldn't have big hardwood trees growing everywhere on a farm and they were too big to fall so they went through and ringbarked them.

However, the idea that the log fallers themselves were saints of the forests was hard to maintain, especially for forestry workers whose personal experiences in the bush suggested otherwise. For Peter Phillips, the retired forestry foreman, there were too many memories of battles supervising careless log fallers:

I said to one chap one day, 'You seem to delight in knocking down as many small trees as you can when you're falling these bigger trees'. 'Oh, well he had a lean that way'.

I said, 'Look', I said, 'Don't tell me cause I've been in this game too long. The tree might have a lean that way but you can always tip it that way or that way ... and if you'd a felled that tree over there ... and I'm quite sure that you could have, those little trees would have still been standing there'. And then of course you get the tractor driver that'd come in with a blade on and push over a whole heap of trees. Well you had to get on to them too ... Then you get the other chap who would go out of his way to spare a small tree. He'd go out of his way to fall a tree away from another one.

With personal evidence like this, timber workers needed a different strategy to settle their minds about 'forest destruction'. When timber workers conceded that there had been destruction in the past, that timber had been 'slaughtered', they then insisted that 'the bad old days' had passed. In the following construction of the past, Steve Williams, with over 60 years working in the industry behind him, acknowledged the 'terrible waste' of the early days. Steve saw it as a part of their history that had returned to haunt them. It fuelled the fire from the conservationists and it was a cruel irony for the resource-depleted mills. It also led to the conclusion that the adoption of 'forest management' could answer all critics:

I think it was big mistake. I've been in the softwood<sup>9</sup> ... in Doyles River right from the word it went. Admittedly, in the early days there was a lot of softwoods got slaughtered there at that time, but Forestry Commission didn't have enough to supervise the falling of the stuff ... Then they gave the smaller mills a scavenger license to go through and cut them ... It made a terrible mess and cut nice young

trees that were coming on ... Yes they overcut and a terrible lot of it was destroyed. I know. I used to shudder.

Nowdays the timber men are timber conscious. They don't like to see anything destroyed that's good to be used. They realise that in years gone by there was a terrible lot of destruction. I saw it with my own eyes. You used to wonder how long it would go on for ... They used to destroy it, and now we can't get enough of it. We just can't get enough of that softwood ...

We were drawing from Riamukka and they had to put a piece of new road in and there was all timber out there just absolutely slaughtered. Blue gum and that, pulled down and smashed. Well, you know, that can't go on for ever. That timber's wanted now, wanted badly. But I still think ... if they were to open the hardwood up in those areas [the national parks] and let it be felled properly, under proper supervision, there'd be a lot of work there, a lot of work, because there's a lot of timber ... But it's got to be done under supervision, proper supervision.

A sense of 'they didn't know better in those days' not only excused the early timber workers, but it also kept the whole phenomenon rooted in the remote past. As Andy Johnson readily conceded:

The poorer stuff now, is that from overcutting in the earlier days? [Interviewer]

No, it was probably from waste in the earlier days. Don't you worry there was an awful lot of waste. But it was an endless supply then. Whether you call it waste or just, lack of foresight I suppose ... But how far do you look to the future?

They didn't in those days. [Andy's wife.]

No they just thought it was going to go on for ever.

## Public representations

One way to sever the past and present, to make sure that the waste of the early days stayed locked into a remote time, was to mythologise the past and sanitise the present. This happened in two ways. First, timber communities constructed a pioneer past which existed in a very different world to that of today. Second, timber workers began to praise the Forestry Commission and its contemporary management practices as a way of minimising the flack from the conservationists.

Most timber workers I spoke with expressed a strong sense of family history, recounting stories of parents and grandparents who had worked in the forests. Their narratives were interspersed with excursions into family photo albums. Here were found fading snapshots of the social life of the early sawmill villages and of bearded fathers or grandfathers log falling in the forests. Recollections like the following were common in all these conversations:

My grandfather, he used to be a cedar-hopper ... they used to float the logs from Casino to the beach ... to load them on the boats to send them over to America and to England ... he used to be a ganger that used to ride the logs and steer them all.

This romantic past did not stay confined to private memory but was the basis for constructing a very elaborate set of public representations. The local media regularly featured stories and photographs of this historical past. On the notice boards of many local pubs, faded photographs of celebrated historical episodes in the timber industry shared pride of place with local football heroes. This pioneer past took on its most tangible presence in the resurrection of the material culture of the timber industry: its technology. Numerous small 'bush museums' sprang up along the coast to cater for the tourist interest in memorabilia. These relics



The cedar getters: notorious for their 'hard working, hard drinking, hard swearing' lives. Cedar getters at their camp on the Gulf, Armidale District, about 1910. (Photo by courtesy of the Forestry Commission of New South Wales.)

of a bygone age came to life at Timbertown, a modern tourist complex at Wauchope, which featured ‘living history’: an operating steam sawmill, pit-saw demonstrations and steam railway rides. The imagery which this material culture promoted, and which was implicit in the private memories, was of a noble heritage: a pioneer past, populated by hardy men who established an important regional industry. However, a strange ambiguity settled over this image.

On the one hand, the nobility resisted the slurs of the conservationists: these men were not the forest butchers depicted by the greenies. Indeed, as noted before, timber workers regarded themselves as the *true* conservationists. For this image they had access to historical precedents. Stories of old Jack Lever—the sawmill worker who refused to log Lever’s Plateau—abounded amongst foresters and timber workers who had known him. Laurie Douglas, who worked alongside Jack Lever, could testify:

He used to handle it himself. He'd go looking for more timber, selecting timber. Like I said, he was terrible conservation minded. He used to love to wander around and just look ... He used to love to look around at where they were logging. See that they did the right thing, even in those days.

On the other hand, when there were admissions of waste, the past had to be distanced by mythologising it. The past was made sufficiently different and remote through the focus on the material hardship and the fascination with technology (the ‘primitive’ old days) to ensure that it remained a place in which the present generation had never lived: ‘The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there’.<sup>10</sup>

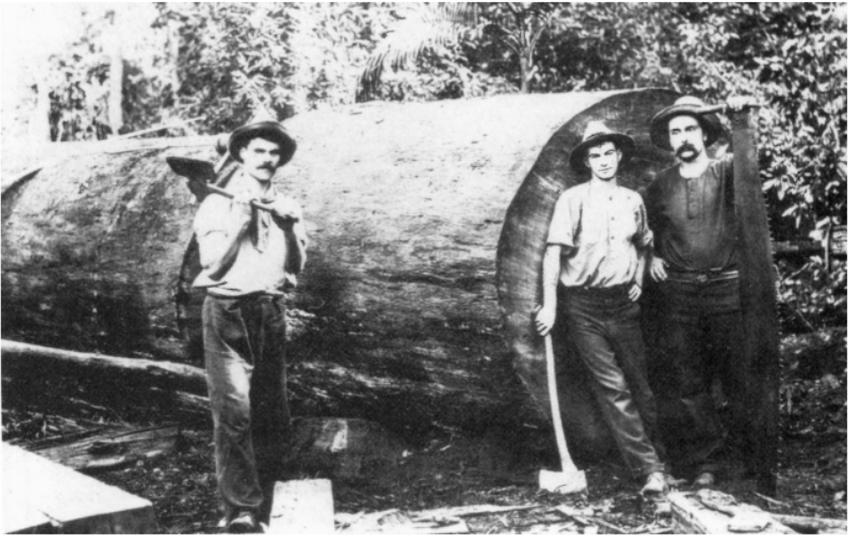
The other way to sever past and present was to recast the present with a new sanitised version of forestry. Forestry Commission practices such as erosion control, wildlife protection and

fire management were regularly praised. Many timber workers (and mill managers in particular) castigated the establishment of national parks because they believed the National Parks service could not manage forests properly. Not only was there the increased risks of fire—the National Parks service was referred to locally as the National Sparks and Wildfire Service. And, to leave timber entirely alone, was not to ‘manage’ the forests. (The basis for this view in the productivist perspective is evident.) By contrast, sawmillers and workers alike strongly affirmed that the Forestry Commission could be counted on to manage the forests properly and its activities justified continued logging operations.

However, in order to see the Forestry Commission in a beneficent role, a particular construction of the forestry past was required. Even more strongly than timber workers, foresters asserted their role as the *first* conservationists. As retired forester Colin Greeves explained to me:

The foresters regard themselves ... as the first conservationists because in the early days of settlement ... the native timber had no value. All it was doing was holding up the opening of the land ... From then on [1916] ... they were fighting to make sure that so much forest country wasn't lost to the settlers who were opening up ... the forest areas ... This was a never ending battle. They were fighting the politicians, the settlers, the farmers ... That's the irony of it ... that was our role, what the conservation lobby were doing later on.

However much the foresters' construction of their past enshrined this theme of embattled conservers, their history still had its skeletons. Several timber workers conceded in the interviews that during the 1950s and 1960s major reforestation work was neglected on the north coast and sustained yield was not achieved for the hardwood forests. We saw in chapter 1 that this was acknowledged by the Forestry Commission. In the 1970s these



Three sleeper cutters before a felled blue gum, Watagan Mountains near Newcastle [date unknown]. Trees this size could take half a day to fell. The axe (centre) and the crosscut saw (right) were both used for felling the tree while the broad axe (left) was used for shaping the sleepers. (Photo by courtesy of the Forestry Commission of New South Wales.)

blemishes were increasingly revealed in conservationist attacks on the Forestry Commission. In turn, foresters fought even harder to establish their conservation credentials. Timber workers closed ranks behind them, a manoeuvre which also required a selective construction of the past, one in which memories of internal struggles and antagonisms between the Forestry Commission and the timber industry were shelved to deal with the larger threat from the common enemy.

Historically the relationship between the timber industry and the Forestry Commission had passed through definite phases of hostility, mostly coinciding with periods when the Forestry Commission sought to enforce new policies or extract higher royalties. In the late 1940s, for example, the relationship was so

badly strained that a conference was cancelled because ‘the various parties were just not talking to each other’.<sup>11</sup> This continued into the 1950s when major timber industry conferences (the Eastern States Timber Industry Stabilisation Conferences) were cancelled from 1953 to 1958.<sup>12</sup> For the sawmillers, their association (the Associated Country Sawmillers) was not only a device to keep prices ‘stable’, it was also designed ‘to fight the Forestry Commission’.<sup>13</sup>

Despite conservationist claims that the Forestry Commission was a ‘captured bureaucracy’, in reality its mission to ‘feed’ the timber industry was always tempered by a complex set of social and political considerations. As well as longstanding pressures from Treasury to balance its budget and pressures from politicians to keep small towns alive,<sup>14</sup> the Forestry Commission also came under new pressures to protect wildlife and prevent soil erosion during logging activities.<sup>15</sup> Within this web of pressures, the Forestry Commission’s commitment to manage the forests for long term timber production engendered hostility from all quarters. The conservationists disputed the Commission’s preoccupation with utilitarian motives while the sawmillers objected loudly to the costs this strategy imposed on them. The insistence by the Forestry Commission that sawmillers accept all marked trees, and not just profitable ones, was a continuing source of tension between both parties. In daily practice, this tension regularly surfaced. In the bush, forestry workers and log fallers often argued over Forestry Commission regulations. In the mill yards, foresters and sawmillers constantly contested the quality of the logs being milled. As Bill Longworth noted, with a wry chuckle, ‘One forester said that if you ever meet a mill owner that’s not going crook, look out for something going on’.

However, in the timber workers’ construction of their industry’s past, these various conflicts with the Forestry Commission were suppressed. Because the major confrontation between forestry

and conservation was fought out in the courts, in the media, and in submissions to public enquiries, it was the Forestry Commission which carried the fight for the forests against the conservationists. Apart from a few public confrontations in the forests, most timber workers had little direct contact with their main adversaries. The terrain on which the battle was fought was the terrain of theoretical knowledge and this, by default, excluded most timber workers. Many of the esoteric debates in the columns of local newspapers were conducted between professional foresters and tertiary-educated conservationists.<sup>16</sup> Many of the specialist articles on aspects of forestry management or the history of the timber industry were provided by foresters.<sup>17</sup> When the Sydney media descended on the forests, local foresters led them into the bush and went on camera to defend their management practices. It was the same with the forest tours conducted by foresters for politicians, tourists, local residents and school children.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, when the onslaught from the conservationists emerged in the 1970s, rough old timber workers and shiny new foresters closed ranks. The antipathy toward the university-trained foresters remained strong but it became more ambiguous. In the new conditions of struggle, formal education took on new value. Mike O'Farrell, who had constantly emphasised the worth of practical knowledge, offered me the following advice when we parted:

Burt Wilson's another man you oughta see, he's the biggest logging contractor in the area ... he logs the mill over the south side. You know, he's pretty educated and he's been through the conservation crowd more than anybody ... the Chapmans are good too ... They've got a mill over on the south side ... They're very educated too ... they put up a fight for us really, them and the Petersons.

Many of the new logging regulations, such as not logging near water courses, had been forced on the Forestry Commission by conservationist pressures. These remained the butt of many jokes in the pub as well as a source of frustration in the bush. But they too now became valuable in the debate with the conservationists because timber workers could point to the progressive measures which the Forestry Commission had taken as evidence that the Commission's management made logging acceptable. In the same way that the forest streams now ran clear, so too did the Commission's 'sanitised present' replace its murky past.

## **Conclusion**

The history constructed by timber workers which I have explored above was both diverse and contradictory: admissions of waste and destruction existed alongside tales of heroic pioneering. As with any history, there were loud silences.

The most profound silences were the absence of class and gender. The protagonists were essentially 'man' and 'nature'. From the cedar getters and early pioneers, through to the foresters of the 1950s and the log fallers of today, ran a common strand of experience which was based on a direct equation between man and the forests. The idea that relations between humans and nature are mediated by class relations of production remained hidden. The amalgamations and modernisations of the 1960s, which produced mill closures and unemployment, were elements of the past which found no voice in popular memory. Technology only functioned as the fascinating machinery of progress and mill closures figured only as avenues to argue that forests recovered. To some extent, repressing the details of the industry's transformation during the 1960s reflected contemporary concerns to blame the conservationists for the current crisis. Because most conservationists argued

that the industry was in jeopardy well before their arrival, timber workers were concerned to contest that argument strongly.

However, this silence must also be seen as a product of the intellectual division of labour and the particular kinds of history which arose in working-class popular memory. 'Class consciousness' was absent from timber workers' shop floor lives. Why should it have been present in their theoretical reflections? Detailed knowledge of their industry, such as its capital structure and the extent and nature of its resource, was not widely available in timber worker communities. With their formal schooling over by the age of 14, timber workers had only limited access to government reports or forestry management plans. Indeed, the main source for workers' detailed information about their industry, given the weakness of the union, was often the manager or boss—a highly selective source.

The gender silences reflected the way in which masculinity—particularly its 'breadwinner' status—structured both private and public realms. The pioneer past was represented as almost exclusively a male domain: the real family partnerships of the early settlers were transformed into the nuclear present with its restrictive gender roles of breadwinner and dependent. The plywood mills often employed families: wife, husband, and sometimes older children. Even where both genders were engaged in waged labour, women were still overwhelmingly seen as wives and mothers in timber communities. During the rainforest controversy, the mills most under threat were plywood mills yet the heated arguments about unemployment were exclusively concerned with the fate of the male breadwinner. Organisations formed by the timber industry, such as Timber Workers in Grafton (TWIG) and Ladies Environmental Awareness of Forests (LEAF), took it as axiomatic

that men's jobs were the ones at risk and LEAF was particularly active in recruiting the wives of timber workers to defend their husband's jobs.

In these last two chapters, it has become clear that the productivist perspective and the contempt for the city are distinctively rural attitudes. The Country Party (now renamed the National Party) drew upon these elements in its growth, and in turn reinforced them. As political scientist Don Aitkin has argued, the 'ideological cement of "country-mindedness"' developed in the late nineteenth century with the growth of primary industries. With the end of rural expansion, and the depression of the 1890s, country people found in the city a scapegoat for their woes: 'they began to place the blame on the "centralizing" and "corrupt" forces of the metropolis'.<sup>19</sup> In the twentieth century, the Country Party institutionalised these sentiments and captured the support of the farmers and the townspeople. The former were 'placed ... at the top of Australian society—the virtuous and hardworking primary producers whose energies produced most of Australia's income and provided employment for everyone else'.<sup>20</sup> The townspeople found that the Country Party's arguments 'seemed to make sense of their own experience: their town was being held back because everything was being controlled from Sydney'.<sup>21</sup>

Far more so than for the city, these sentiments cut across class. 'Ruralism' spoke to farmers, town shopkeepers and rural workers alike. This partly explains why rural workers failed to become industrially militant, despite the fact that they endured a working week of more than 40 hours for 20 years longer than their urban counterparts. 'Ruralism' became a unifying force because its various elements resonated with the realities of rural working-class life. At the same time, the precarious world of manual labour—both its physical and its economic risks—fundamentally shaped the rural attitudes held by timber workers. Their hostility to outsiders

was typically rural; yet their contempt for educated outsiders was specifically working class.

For these reasons it is inadequate to explain rural responses to middle-class conservationist politics as simply ‘redneck conservatism’—the eruption of ignorance and prejudice from Australia’s own ‘deep south’. Many of the conservationists, oblivious to class politics, saw their battle as simply progressive versus conservative, ‘change’ versus the country ‘establishment’. The drawing together of workers and bosses during the rainforest controversy made these equations easy to draw. Yet this response failed to register how much timber worker hostility to conservation politics was a class response, a reaction moulded by the harsh experiences of their arduous working lives.

## CHAPTER 5

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### 'It's the thickest green': the rainforest conservationists

You've got to live in the country to understand how country people think. And it's totally different to the way that a university graduate ... thinks. [The timber workers] were getting told that they didn't know ... what they were doing, that they were destroying everything. That wasn't what was happening at all. They weren't destroying everything. What they were doing, they thought, would be the best use of that particular piece of forest ... They've been doing it for the last hundred years.

Martin Forbes should know: his great grandfather was a cedar cutter and his family has lived on the north coast since the 1860s. But Martin Forbes was not a timber worker; he was one of the most ardent of the rainforest conservationists. In the next breath, Martin launched into a eulogy befitting the most dedicated nature lover:

... to go and stand on the end of the Pinnacle ... Because if you don't do that, I don't think you've lived. That you've got to go up there and walk through that forest, and get frightened by a cat bird, and hear a lyrebird ... to see a pidda fly up and go and look for its nest ... to see the red

and white crayfish that are in Grady's Creek ... that's what the Border Ranges is there for. It's for those things to be available for my kids and their kids and their kid's kids.

## **The old and the new**

When Martin entered the rainforest fray, he became embroiled into a double-edged conflict. In the 1970s he and some local nature conservationists linked up with the Colong Committee in Sydney to try to keep the loggers out of the rainforests which straddled the border between New South Wales and Queensland. By the 1980s he was struggling to distance himself from his new allies: the Terania Creek protesters. In the public mind, Terania Creek has always been symbolic of the north coast rainforest campaign. The blockade of the Terania Creek basin became the media image that monopolised public perceptions of the rainforest campaign and obscured its older roots in the work of long-time members of the north coast community, men and women who had grown up alongside the timber workers and mill managers:

We were established members of the local society ... I'd been president of the Rotary Club ... Both of us have been president or secretary of something or rather for the last 30 years ... We were part of the community and we had to front up in the street and be able to still smile at the other guy who may be a timber worker, because a third of the town were timber workers. I used to go fishing with a guy who was the saw doctor at the local saw mill ...

The reaction of Martin and his friends to the new settlers echoed that of the timber workers who spoke in chapters 3 and 4: they felt contempt for their alternative lifestyles and rural resentment towards them as newcomers. But where the timber workers could give full vent to their antipathy, the demands of a political

alliance forced Martin to repress his. Martin's wife, Helen, voiced her feelings at the predicament:

Those creeps ... came over here on two occasions and sat in our chairs ... they hadn't had baths for weeks. Their toenails were like claws on an eagle.

And, in the months following the Terania Creek blockade, the price of that alliance was forcefully brought home to the long-time local conservationists:

[After Terania Creek] our oldest in age, two members [of the local conservationist society], were sworn at, abused, you name it. Walking down the street of their own town, because of the Terania Creek type thing. They were called every name that they could be called. They were very upset. They're 80 something now. They genuinely cared about trees and birds and forest. But because of the way in which the conservation movement graduated, they ended up by being abused in the street of their own town, because they were the ones who had started that other mob off. And that's not the way it should be.

But the irony of Terania Creek was even sharper. Without that blockade and its publicity, the Border Rangers, and all the other contested pockets of rainforest along the north coast, would never have been saved from logging. As Martin himself conceded:

I don't think there would have been a decision made on the rainforest parks in total, without the demonstrations at Terania Creek. But I just wish to hell it hadn't happened.

## Diverse motives, common purpose

Sally Johnston, an exile from the city, moved to live on a derelict dairy farm in the Terania Creek basin in the early 1970s. Her orchard and vegetable garden, planted on land reclaimed from lantana, spread down to the edge of the creek, while across the valley rose giant blackbutt stands, where trees over a thousand years old sheltered the emerging rainforest species. Looking back to the past decade, Sally recalled the early stirrings of dissent:

We just had a whole lot of pie in the sky ideas about self-sufficiency and came up in a Holden sedan with a few goats and a few ducks that got wiped out the first night by foxes. And ideas of vege gardens and all that. We found out really quickly that you can't exist and you need money ... it was derelict farm land. It was really overgrown with weeds. So we were really heavily organised in the beginning trying to get a roof over our heads. And then we found out about the forest, that it was going to be logged. We hadn't even investigated the basin much at that stage. We'd gone for a few walks and suddenly realised how incredible it was. We hadn't even realised when we first came how beautiful it was ...

The first thing [the local forester] just said, off the cuff, cause he had no idea, of course, of what could happen, what kind of opposition he might have. He just said, 'Oh yes we're going to clearfell it all' ... So we just felt like we were going to leave. We actually put the place on the market cause we couldn't face the fight. And then we just started to meet other people in the valley who it turned out had just moved in. A whole mass of them had just moved in within that year or within those few months. Also buying land and moving out of the city and coming up here. And they all really encouraged us. And getting together we all encouraged each other to stay and fight it.

We just decided we'll knuckle down and fight it. But we had no idea how long it would take. Or how much money or effort. [Laughs]

Sally was typical of dozens of new settlers on the north coast. They had moved from the cities in search of a lifestyle in harmony with their environment. Luke Wheeler, an architect, explained his move to Terania Creek as: 'getting away from the rat race ... getting away from the city, away from all the pollution and so on'. For the new settlers, the lush forests of the north coast valleys represented the kind of environment they had dreamed about in the grey bleakness of suburbia. Not surprisingly, when the forests were due for logging, Sally and her friends rallied in their defence. In the spring of 1979, television screens across the nation lit up with scenes of 'hippie' protesters obstructing bulldozers or perched in the branches of forest giants. Loggers revved their chainsaws and police bundled protesters into paddy waggons. The scenes, repeated many times since, have now lost their novelty for city viewers. But in 1979 the blockade of Terania Creek ushered in a new phase in Australian environmental politics: the era of direct action blockades.

The cause of this celebrated chaos was the impending logging of a small forest basin, probably the least significant of the many threatened northern NSW rainforests. Its significance lay not in its size, but in its impact: it represented the forging of an alliance between city conservationists and the north coast's new settlers; it was the first rainforest battle which captured public attention on a large scale; it was the battle which set the terms for the conservationists' victory three years later.

In the mid-1970s conservationists in Sydney and in northern New South Wales resumed a century's old struggle to have the Border Ranges incorporated into a national park. However, after 1979 Terania Creek became the dominant political controversy,



Confrontation between police and protesters at Terania Creek, September 1979. (Photo by courtesy of the Terania Creek residents.)

spawning a month-long conflict between protesters and police and culminating in a major public inquiry into forestry operations in the area. In the early 1980s further campaigns to save rainforest stands in the Washpool wilderness, near Grafton, and in the Hastings Valley, near Port Macquarie, widened the rainforest conservation cause into a political struggle on many fronts. In 1982 another forest confrontation broke out on the slopes of Mt Nardi, in the valley adjacent to Terania Creek. The NSW government's rainforest decision of October 1982 was a response to all these various campaigns. Despite a common concern to stop rainforest logging, each of these various campaigns differed in significant ways and this was evident in the diversity of motives behind the local conservationists.

Like Martin Forbes, Barry Peterson had lived and work in

the Tweed district all his life. Inspired by the Lamington National Park just across the Queensland border, Barry recognised as early as the 1950s that the greatest value of the Border Ranges lay in their natural beauty, not their timber resources. For this generation of conservationists, the ‘new’ rainforest struggle was viewed from within a traditional nature conservation perspective. In the words of Phil Woodrow, a Lismore doctor who had also lived in the area all his life: conservation was a principle for ‘people who simply love the land, love trees, love the bush and love walking’.

However, for the new comers on the north coast the issue of rainforest conservation was much more complex. To begin with, the new settlers were themselves a diverse grouping. As well as the ‘hippies’, there were many professional middle-class workers who moved with their families to live on the north coast. There were also former north coast residents, home after a spell in the city.

For many of the alternative lifestyle settlers, preserving the Terania Creek basin was readily absorbed into a ‘lifestyle struggle’ they had been waging since their arrival. Terania Creek saw them pitted against the same local conservative forces who had frustrated their ambitions for years. Jeni Forbes, a long time resident of Tuntaball Falls, the main alternative community near Nimbin, recalled:

Terania really was the first time the alternative movement stood up and said, ‘You have to change’ ... because so many of the people up here were doing something vaguely illegal somewhere along the line ... [things like breaking council regulations, unregistered vehicles, having a few dope plants] ... Multiple occupancy is another issue. These two things co-exist. The energy that went into getting multiple occupancy accepted legally, those activist people were very much involved once again. They came and joined the camp and put their energy in.

So it really was a coming together of a lot of freethinking people with a lot of ability and it really was the first time the alternative movement stood up and said, 'Enough is enough' ... that's what makes it historically so incredible. It really was a thing of we against them ... It really was a thing of standing up and saying, 'There are better ways of dealing with this world and we're prepared to make a stand on this one because it really is important' ... It was a real statement about everything that the alternate movement is about, from every direction ...

In the rainforest campaigns further south, the pattern of involvement followed a different course. In Grafton, the local branch of the National Parks Association took up the formidable task of wresting the Washpool, a vast tract of mountainous rainforest and hardwood forest, from the timber industry. None of the locals had any immediate interest in the forest at stake. In many respects, they were far more 'ordinary' than their colleagues further north:

*John Flynn:* I think most of us would have been surprised if anybody had said six months before that, that we would have been ... running public meetings in the town, and copping stuff in the paper about us and things like that. And TV news coverage and ... meeting politicians and that sort of thing. We would have said, no way it would ever happen ... I don't reckon there's a more conservative sort of a person when it comes to that sort of thing than me.

*Maria Cornish:* When the people in Grafton looked at us, they don't see people with beards and long hair. We're just normal, you just pass them down the street type thing. Except they've got this thing about the environment.

[Laughs]

But, like the rainforest conservationists right along the coast, there was a distinctive middle-class impulse behind the Grafton

campaigners. When asked why she had returned to her home ground after several years studying in the city, Sarah Coombes replied:

Because I always wanted to come back to Grafton because I've always had an idea of being an activist or a reformist or whatever. So, if I wanted to change the world, I figured that the best place to start was my home town because I knew it best and knew the power structure and who was what.

Further south, near Port Macquarie, Rachel Winter took up the challenge posed by forestry operations in the Hastings Valley. Like Sarah, Rachel's involvement in rainforest conservation drew upon a background of social activism. An early member of the women's movement in the 1960s, Rachel's involvement in residents' action campaigns during the early 1970s sharpened her political focus on environmental issues. But the emotional impetus for that vision went back to her childhood:

I very well remember the first time [my father] took me down to Blue Gum Forest. I must have been about eight or so. Being overpowered by these great Sydney blue gums ... But I also remember ... around about that same age ... wanting to be in a place where in some way I had the ability to know that in every direction I looked to the horizon over a great distance, that would not be disturbed or hurt by human beings, that that would be in its natural state and that I could somehow keep it that way and enjoy that freedom of being in a place like that.

Frank Littleford was another of the Hastings campaigners whose long-standing commitment to forestry conservation brought him into the rainforest fray during the mid-1970s. In the early days of his career as a biologist, Frank became outraged at political intrusion into his professional domain and this propelled him towards forestry activism:

my superiors ... were far more interested in tuning into what the latest political, the colour and attitudes of the latest political boss ... that was compromising ... principles ... interfering with what we were doing. We shouldn't have been sitting back down there, for instance, and allowing forestry to develop intensive operations right up to [our] boundaries.



Once the rainforest controversy climaxed as a major political campaign, many of these early motivations became absorbed into a deeper and more complex pattern of feelings. In many ways, the rainforest issue became the cargo on a voyage of personal fulfilment. Saving rainforests presented many of these middle-class activists with a chance to bring excitement and purpose into lives which had been drab or drifting. As John Flynn quietly reflected:

Well it sort of took over my life I think. And, it's become an extremely important thing really ... I'm on the state council [of a national conservation body] and I'm now on the executive as well. Which seems to me to be a long jump from a bloke that used to do nothing and remain anonymous to the greatest extent possible ... After that intensive period [of two or three years] all this sort of tapered off. And I sometimes miss that activity because it gave a great deal of direction and purpose to your life. And sometimes I wonder whether we're wondering along and not getting hold of issues which are just as important around the area ...

And Sally Johnston conceded:

I think all of us got pleasure out of harassing politicians. That was just a really deep part of it. Also because most of us had some sort of academic background, even if it was

only for a few years. We had all these skills and we weren't using them, being farmers. And so there was partly that motivation also. Not wanting to stagnate.

**Justin Lee, a former art student, was present for the whole blockade:**

It was sort of like how probably it may have been for somebody who was at Gallipoli or El Alemain. You know, you really felt as though, OK there's no guns going off everywhere ... and I'm very grateful for that. But you were actually in history in the making ... Sometimes, it's like a hard act to follow and I've just never been able to have anything happen in my life that was as uplifting and as fulfilling as that. Those 30 days for me were just incredible days, they really were ...

### **Terania Creek: middle class politics in the bush**

For over four years the city conservationists showed little interest in Terania Creek and its new settler advocates. In ecological terms, Terania Creek was insignificant compared with the Border Ranges, the major long term goal of the city conservationists. Yet once Terania Creek became a dramatic media event, with nightly television scenes of blockaders leaping in front of bulldozers, the city conservationists quickly realised their chance to capitalise on the growing public interest in the issue.

Frank Littleford had been pursuing the rainforest quest for many years in what seemed an almost futile struggle. With Terania Creek all that changed:

[The government] always realised they could back off with impunity. There was not going to be any backlash, there was not going to be any upset, there was not going to be any focus or anything. And Wran said to us, 'You make it an issue. I'll act if you make it an issue'. And that's the way

the media and our democracy works ... We'd been working on it for years and it wasn't until Terania and the great big blow up that suddenly rainforest became a public issue. Prior to that ... rainforest had been a concern to people in the conservation movement, but it hadn't been a public issue. Once it became a public issue, then we had some chance of winning it ... OK it was divisive, OK it was full of tension, fraught with bloody problems, danger and everything else. But the point is, it was after that we actually had a bargaining chip.

Terania Creek typified a new direction in Australian environmental politics—direct action blockading. Yet, as with the Franklin blockade in Tasmania three and a half years later, the Terania Creek blockade was not capable of physically preventing the logging operations. While it did begin as a last-ditch attempt to hold up the bulldozers, the blockade quickly became a middle-class battle in which intellectual resources, not brute force, provided the key to success. As middle-class intellectuals, the conservationists were able to transfer their city resources—their political and media contacts, their researched arguments, their articulate presentation—into the rustic setting of the bush. There, the protesters had access to those resources which a major 'media stunt' required. They had scouts with walkie-talkies on ridge tops and trail bike couriers who could warn the protesters about impending police actions. At the camps and in the forest were protesters with cameras and tape recorders, and there were film and television crews on hand to capture each conflict with the police or the loggers. As a result, the police (and the judicial system) faced formidable opponents: articulate protesters whose resistance was made permanent on film.

*Give Trees a Chance*, the protesters' own cinematic record of their blockade, showed several scenes of police arrests. One protester, struggling with the police inside a paddy waggon, lost no opportunity to broadcast her perspective: 'You'll have to stop



The protesters had access to all of those resources which ensured that the Terania Creek blockade would be a successful media event. On the ridge above Terania Creek, September 1979. (Photo by courtesy of the Terania Creek residents.)

assaulting me officer. You're assaulting me officer. There's no law says I've got to keep my head in this window, no law whatsoever says I can't put my head out of this window. You should go for a walk in there officer, it'll blow your mind. It's beautiful. It's absolutely beautiful in there.<sup>1</sup>

Paul Firestone, a college lecturer, had taken time off work to be at the blockade. Within hours he was off to jail, but not before his friends had filmed the episode:

We had the whole of my arrest on 16 millimetre movie film ... The tactic of filming and taping as much of the action as possible was a good one. Because when it finally

came to a court case, the police would give their evidence ... The witnesses would then be shown ... the film ... Then they were questioned on the discrepancies between what was actually filmed ... and what they'd presented as evidence to court. And they had to state that their evidence was not in agreement with what actually happened.

The 'message of Terania' was not just confined to statements and arguments. From the voices and guitars of the protesters arose spirited songs and chants. Jeni Forbes, a professional musician living near Nimbin, recalled with excitement:

Just the fact of two hundred cops arriving over a hill is something else to see ... when in fact we weren't doing anything. All we were doing was being there, standing, singing ... it never ceases to amaze me how a mandolin and a guitar can be a 'weapon' ... and we were using music as a ... tool.

The music maintained the protesters' morale in the tussles with police and during their defiance of the bulldozers. It also gave wide coverage, through the extensive media presence, to their attitudes towards the forests:

*Take your bulldozer from under our noses  
We're not as gutless as a sawmill supposes  
Hands off our greenery  
Take home your machinery  
Take your bulldozers away.  
Standards Mill to the devil  
Choke on your sawdust  
You're not on the level  
Save our forests for ever  
Take your bulldozers away.<sup>2</sup>*



Music and politics combined in the campaign to save Terania Creek from logging. Terania Creek blockage, September 1979. (Photo by courtesy of the Terania Creek residents.)

The importance of the Terania Creek blockade went far beyond the boundaries of that forest basin. In the broader political context the blockade became the bargaining chip with which to pressure the politicians. The presence of the city media in the bush gave the local conservationists an ideal forum in which to broadcast widely their views on rainforest logging.<sup>3</sup> In turn, this gave their colleagues in the cities an exceptional opportunity to build a large urban support base for the campaign. Both in the city, and in the bush, it was the intellectual skills of these middle-class activists which gave them the upper hand over their working-class adversaries.

As for the timber workers, they could only stand by in frustration and bewilderment. Many timber workers wanted to intervene physically and throw the protesters out of the forest, but the presence of the police, and the bad publicity of violence, held them back. Similarly, those conservationists who wanted to take physical confrontation further—such as using explosives for sabotage—were quickly overruled by the majority who realised their power was based on their non-violence and the dramatic publicity this provided. Jeni Forbes remembered:

like it's very easy to stop a bulldozer ... you just have to cut a wire. Like we'd have young men coming up to us with all sorts of stunningly simple ideas. They can see the trees coming down. It's hurting. Like when they first started to log and take out the trees at Terania, it's sort of one of the most painful things to stand there and just watch it happen. Just watch those people chop them down and watch the trucks carry the logs out. And that creates the sort of feeling of 'We've got to do something' and you can only desperately try and persuade everybody not to do anything that would be construed as violent or terroristic.

And Simon Frazer, also from Tuntable Falls, put it succinctly:

It still seemed pretty clear to us that if we started using guns and explosives or even staking tires, that that would undo any good that we were doing ourselves.

But, in fact, acts of sabotage did occur. Trees had metal spikes driven into them, logs were cut up, logging machinery was damaged. These episodes highlighted one of the most complex and contradictory aspects of the rainforest campaign. On the one hand, the rainforest campaign was shaped by a cool professionalism, in which middle-class moderation was a valuable asset. On the other hand, the media thrilled to the sight of bearded 'hippies' throwing themselves in front of bulldozers. Once this more emotionally

charged and spontaneous dimension of the struggle arose, extreme actions, such as sabotage, became more likely.

Well before the blockade, the Terania Creek protesters used their professional skills to make their own television commercial. Titled ‘Will there be room for Cathy too?’, this 30-second film showed a potential collision between a log truck and a mother with her child. During this lobbying period, ‘maintain respectability’ was the usual advice from sympathetic politicians. Luke Wheeler wryly recalled:

[The Minister] said we should shave our beards and get a hair cut. He said, ‘Look at my press secretary here, blah, blah, blah.’ Cleanshaven.

What did you say? [Interviewer]

‘It’s got nothing to do with it. We’re talking about trees’.  
But he said, ‘If you want to impress people, if you want to impress politicians, you should look like an IBM salesman’.  
[Laughter]

But once the blockade was under way, ‘respectability’ took a back seat. Now the valued asset was free television time. At the same time, the politics of protest were themselves transformed. While the same professionalism was evident in handling the media and the politicians during the blockade, a new agenda inspired by the values of the alternative movement began to contest the exclusive focus on political lobbying. This was exemplified by the decision-making process at the blockade. Where the city conservationists had for years been content to pursue their politics within the confines of traditional organisational structures, for the Terania Creek blockaders such structures were rejected as hierarchical and elitist. At the blockade, communal responsibility was the order of the day. Luke Wheeler noted the predicament this posed for the police:



Inspired by the values of the alternative movement, the Terania Creek blockade moved beyond the issue of rainforest logging to embrace a broader political agenda. Decision making became a communal process, posing a predicament for both the police and the protesters. The campsite at Terania Creek blockage, September 1979. (Photo by courtesy of the Terania Creek residents.)

There were 200 people out there in a circle who were all equal and so if you wanted to do anything you had to do it to the lot of them. [The police] couldn't handle that at all. There was no one person they could pin point.

But for the protesters themselves, the predicament was equally dramatic. As Justin Lee observed:

A lot of the group decisions were not obeyed. The splinter group would usually go off and do its own thing. Like if we said, 'Do we spike the trees?' And everybody says, 'No, we will not spike the trees', the splinter group would go off and spike the trees.

This uneasy co-existence of 'straight' and alternative, a co-existence of the middle-class moderation that goes with elitist

lobbying and the more spontaneous impulses that accompany direct-action protests, has remained one of the most distinctive features of environmental politics in Australia during the last decade. From the banks of the Franklin River, where a suit-attired Bob Brown was politely arrested, to the Daintree forest road with its 'hippie' protesters buried in the ground, this shifting tension between middle-class respectability and dramatic media stunts has been played out again and again.

During the rainforest campaign, this co-existence lost its balance. Three years after the Terania Creek blockade, another forest confrontation occurred at Mt Nardi, on the edge of the Nightcap Range. This new outbreak of conflict followed in the wake of several years of complex political manoeuvring, of a judicial inquiry and court cases where the conservationists' middle-class skills—particularly their legal and scientific knowledge—dictated the pattern of play.<sup>4</sup> For the Nightcap Action Group, drawn mainly from the Tumble Falls community, the frustrations of the long delays and the immediate threats of logging, brought on the strategy of 'another Terania'.

The lessons in using the media had been well learnt. Suzie Browne and Patrick Jones, who had moved to Tumble Falls in the early 1970s, recalled the pattern of the protests:

*Patrick:* We knew when the trucks would come ... we'd ring Brisbane. Brisbane would get the helicopters ready. They'd all come down here. We'd set up a launch pad up here, next to the camp. And the helicopter'd arrive, then the logging trucks would come, and then we'd all start throwing ourselves in front of the logging trucks.

*Suzie:* Cause there was no point in doing anything risky if it wasn't being filmed by media. It sounds funny but it's just exactly how it is ... for every person who went into

[pause] ... direct combat ... [we] had one person writing down everything that happened and another person photographing it where possible ...

Despite the continuity with the tactics of the Terania Creek blockade, other subtle changes had been underway in the valleys around Nimbin that made Mt Nardi a very different protest. A new wave of settlers, many drawn from the young urban unemployed working class, had begun to arrive in the early 1980s. Dubbed the 'droogs' by the first wave of new settlers, their presence came as a shock. Jeni Forbes explained:

We have so many young, 18 to 25 white unemployed male—the forgotten group ... We call them the droogs ... They're basically homeless, unemployed, unemployable now, who have no faith in themselves. All they can do is wipe themselves out on anything, anything. And so consequently, we do have the reality of dealing with smack, here, which we didn't have for years ...

At the same time, a radical core of environment activists, termed by some 'the feral greenies', began to play an increasingly prominent part in the local rainforest campaign. As well as the locals, roving outsiders, attracted by the excitement and extremism which physical confrontation offered, converged on the mountain. With the combination of all these new elements, the Mt Nardi protest took a different path to that of its predecessor. Jeni Forbes recalled:

around the fire meeting ... there was someone shouting and berating and everything like that. And it was a really ugly black, black energy that would generate at times and we would have to work really really hard to contain it.

Patrick Jones, present for the whole of the Nightcap campaign, offered this insight into the protesters:

It was over about three months ... it was a long time, it seemed like much longer having at least a 100 people living there all the time in tents. Late at night there'd be all sorts of heavy stuff going on. Screaming. Some people would be snapping out, other people would be trying to calm them down. When you get the radical forefront of the green movement ... you get a whole lot of people who are very gorilla like. Their hearts are in the right place, but their way of doing things is really crude. That helps when you've got to lie in front of trucks and things, of course, but in other ways they were much too aggressive, much too heavy and the whole camp was often really intense ... there's a whole roving brigade of people who are involved in the conservation movement and they set up their base here and that's what happened.

Patrick also recalled one extreme episode that was nipped in the bud:

A small number of people wanted to go to incredible extremes. Like I remember going up there one morning, really early, just before breakfast, and there's this guy ... who was a problem from the beginning to the end, or until we had to ask him to leave. And it was early in the morning and he'd collected two buckets of shit, right, and he was mixing them up with warm water with a big long stick. And that was a putrid sight, it was right in the middle of the campfire where everybody was having a cup of tea and getting ready to start the day. And he's stirring two buckets of shit with the intent of throwing it on the truck driver's face as he went through. And it wasn't necessary. We knew we could be effective without doing things like that ... it was really hard to talk him out of doing it. And

in the end he took the buckets across the road to where he was gonna throw them from and left them there luckily. And then he climbed a tree and didn't come down for a while.

Ironically, for the original new settlers—the original Terania Creek protesters— all these changes brought a fresh insight into what their rural adversaries has experienced a decade before. As Sally Johnston noted sadly:

The original inhabitants didn't like what we were doing. A polarisation set up reasonably early in the piece. Which I still regret. I'd do it all again but I'm still really sorry that it's caused such a rift. Such hatred ... I guess I know how they feel. Now that I'm over 30 and all my friends are, there's a whole wave of new young alcoholics moving into the valley and I just feel really freaked by it and really defensive and all that. And I'm sure that's exactly how they felt when we moved in. A wave of new people with new ideas that they didn't want.

## **Images of nature**

Throughout their political campaigning, in both their direct actions and their lobbying, the rainforest conservationists drew upon their middle-class resources constantly. Nowhere was this class distinction between timber workers and conservationists sharper than in the imagery of nature constructed by the conservationists. Like the timber workers, this imagery was intimately tied to their working lives. Despite a variety of specific occupations, the rainforest conservationists were overwhelmingly professionals who worked with ideas or people, rather than labourers who shaped matter.<sup>5</sup> As such, their relationship to the natural environment was quite different to that of the timber workers. Though often as intimate with the details of the forests—either through scientific study

or bushwalking—the conservationists did not work at transforming those forests into marketable commodities. Thus, they did not rely on the forests for their livelihoods. Furthermore, as middle-class workers, their intellectual resources, not their physical strength, were their major assets in their working lives.

For many conservationists, rainforest was overwhelmingly associated with images of lushness. Luke Wheeler, an exile from the winters of Melbourne, explained his motives for moving to Terania in the following way:

I think most people who've come to the country have come because they wanted to get away from the grey into the green. And the rainforest symbolises the green. It's the ultimate green, it's the thickest green, it's the most luxuriant thing we have here.

During the rainforest campaign, many of the most effective pieces of propaganda took advantage of this imagery. As the *Save Colong Bulletin* (the rainforest conservation 'flagship') explained: 'We are also printing a coloured rainforest poster, in the knowledge that good photography is perhaps our most persuasive argument'.<sup>6</sup> The Sydney conservationists published postcards, posters and leaflets, adorned with images of luxuriant rainforest, and they lobbied state politicians with a set of pictorial slides featuring beautiful rainforest scenes. Sun-lit ferns and creepers became the standard visual metaphor for rainforest in the television footage which went to air during the campaign.

Closely linked to the imagery of lushness, was the emotive language of rarity. The rainforests were depicted as rapidly disappearing vestiges of an ancient and complex ecosystem. This had a scientific side to it whereby conservationists regularly stressed the importance of rainforests as habitats for endangered species, as sources for gene pools, and as possible repositories for valuable pharmaceutical drugs. While these various scientific arguments

would invariably surface in most of the rainforest propaganda, the theme of rarity was the argument given most prominence. It was the idea which proved the most captivating. Linda White left Melbourne at the age of 16 to settle at Tuntable Falls and was active throughout the Terania Creek blockade. For her, the issue was quite simple:

As a last remaining piece of rainforest which really should be preserved ... it just was beautiful, very beautiful forest and there's not much of it left.

Martin Forbes recalled the strategy his group developed to win public support for a Border Ranges national park:

The emotive aspect was developed through Antarctic beeches. We used Antarctic beeches as these immortal trees that had been there since before Christ was born and some guy putting a road through with a bulldozer pushing them down. And we used that as an emotive issue to grab the minds of the north coast population.

In contrast to the pollution and decay of the cities, the pristine nature of unlogged forests stood out. Brian Wallace, a doctor living near Port Macquarie, was enthralled by the diversity and the virginity of the forests in the Hastings Valley:

There were ... up in that valley pure snow gum forests, pure blue gum forests. Things that you just don't see. Untouched blackbutt forest, which you don't see either. Anywhere on the coast. Cause they've been logged out ... [After liquidation logging] what came up was weeds and wattles ... there'd be a few rainforest species ... but there'd be very few compared with the rich diversity that you had beforehand.

At times, the response to the forests took on religious overtones. Barry Peterson recalled his response to walking through the rainforests of Lever's Plateau:

you feel like you're in a cathedral ... You can look for 200 yards and all you see is the great columns and there's the canopy.

And Patrick Wright spoke of the surrounding forests serving as a 'temple' for the Tuntable Falls community.

These various elements were all part of the perception of nature that developed from a passionate involvement in the rain-forest campaign. But they were also part of a conscious language of public relations. As the following excerpts from a rainforest campaign leaflet show, these perceptions were used emotively and skilfully to create a sense of impending disaster:

Deep in the hills ... lie ancient rainforest. In the sheltered gullies sub-tropical rainforest flourishes with its palms, sculptured ancient buttresses, orchids and ferns. Near the tops of the hills are the great cool temperate rainforests of Antarctic Beech and coachwood.

Right now these remnant rainforests are being logged mercilessly. The remaining pristine rainforest will be logged out by 1986. Sub-tropical rainforest is virtually clearfelled ... The great diversity of animals that depend on mature rainforest are left to die ... <sup>7</sup>

This kind of imagery and language was directed at influencing public opinion to pressure the politicians to intervene and halt the logging. Conservationists were well aware that they had a 'marketable commodity'. Sally Johnston's husband, Roger, summed it up well when he observed:

It just happened that rainforests were beautiful and it was an emotive word and it could be played on and so it was. But you try and fight that campaign over the brigalow scrubs that are being cleared or mangrove swamps and you're not going to get the same kind of campaign at all because people can't relate to them.

These various perceptions of the natural environment were very different to those of the timber workers. Where for timber workers, nature was primarily a source for material wealth, for most conservationists it was a source of intellectual or spiritual wealth. When they spoke about forests, conservationists were far more interested in the spiritual values of wilderness or the scientific intricacies of rainforest ecosystems than they were in silviculture or other forest management issues. Conservationist attacks on the Forestry Commission during the rainforest campaign (and in most other forestry battles before and since) were notable for the persistent criticism that the Commission gave priority to timber production rather than conservation values in its management of the forests.<sup>8</sup>

Conservationists refused to engage the Forestry Commission on its own terms but insisted on broadening the debate about land management to include what they regarded as important non-utilitarian values. Eventually the conservationists recognised that in their political lobbying the language of wilderness and ecology had limited mileage, and they began to address questions of timber production more seriously. But for most of the time, the forestry debate was a debate between two very different perspectives, each rooted in two different working worlds. The foresters and the timber workers constructed nature around their ethos of 'wise use' conservation.<sup>9</sup> For them, the forests had to be productive because they worked there every day to secure their livelihoods. At the same time, the forests had to be protected so that the next generation of loggers could also gain a livelihood there. By contrast, for most conservationists, 'conservation' meant 'preservation' and the distance of their working lives from those forests was considerable. When Brian Wallace voiced his anti-utilitarian conception of nature, the material security of his middle-class existence as a doctor, and its intellectual values, was dramatically evident:

Here we are destroying it, without ever having studied it ... those of us who are perhaps, scientifically educated, say, 'But look, this is a precious heritage forever, and if you're going'—it's like pulling out you know, your books out of the finest library in the world, and saying, 'These are the only copies but we need to make a fire tonight, because we need to cook the dinner'. And burning them. Saying, 'Well the bloody things are there. I want to cook my dinner. Let's use it.'

We're doing the same sort of thing. We're destroying this magnificent heritage that we don't even understand. We have no idea of how it all works, how it all links together, or even what's there. New species are cropping up all the time when people actually go into the places and study them. And that to me is what the real sin of all this is.

In a similar way, the conservationists idolised the purity and virginity of unlogged forests and this strongly reflected their middle-class distaste for the environmental costs of material production. Just as the early English nature poets had written their verses in outrage against the depredations of early industrial capitalism, so too did the conservationists of the late 1960s and early 1970s construct their eulogies for wilderness as a rejection of late industrial capitalism. For both groups, the 'city' stood for the bleakness of industrial destruction while the 'country' symbolised the unspoilt remnants. Thus the spiritual loading which wilderness assumed reflected a retreat from the city into the realm of untouched isolation: '[Wilderness] serves as both a psychological and a physical retreat, a place where man may find solitude from the pressures of urbanisation and an opportunity to recognise and appreciate his own basic dependence upon the earth for survival'.<sup>10</sup>

## **'Victims of history'**

Like the timber workers, the conservationists located their current struggles within an historical context. Unlike the timber workers they constructed this history out of written materials rather than family memories or material artefacts. Several histories of the rainforest campaign and episodes within it were produced by conservationists.<sup>11</sup> As well as these histories, the conservationists used historical material as a major part of their propaganda. Using their academic skills, the conservationists were able to construct a history of a rapacious timber industry, oblivious to the interests of the environment and its workers. The destruction of the Big Scrub, the original rainforests which covered the river valleys of the north coast, was often invoked. Though most of the NSW rainforests had long since disappeared under the plough, conservationists were still able to make the link with the timber industry by referring to the early cedar getters. These culprits provided the bridge between the early days of 'terrible waste' and the more recent years of chronic overcutting. For example, 'The cedar-cutters began the tradition of overcutting of forests which is still honoured, where possible, in the region today'.<sup>12</sup> Most importantly, the industry's more recent history was presented in terms of cold-hearted restructuring, particularly job losses from the introduction of new technology, and the wasteful use of forest resources. In the vaults of the past could be found embarrassing material with which to attack the Forestry Commission. Excerpts from the 1967 Timber Inquiry and the historical background in the Forestry Commission's own submission to the Terania Creek inquiry were used to build on the theme of the Forestry Commission as the timber industry's compliant servant.

The past could also offer inspiration in the struggle to establish national parks. The advocates for a Border Ranges national park

had nearly a century of heroes to draw upon. Conservationists felt pride when they recalled the early struggles to establish a National Parks service; they felt outrage when they recalled that the areas they were now fighting for had already been declared national parks over 40 years before.<sup>13</sup> In their journal articles defending their stand on both the Terania Creek and Mount Nardi issues, the conservationists gave prominence to excerpts from newspapers of the 1930s which showed that a Nightcap National Forest had been proclaimed in 1937 and was now one of the major areas due to be logged.<sup>14</sup>

Unlike the timber workers, for whom history was a kind of background tapestry—the ‘place’ from where the family had come—for the conservationists history was much more precise and their use of it was much more deliberate. Not only did they have the skills and resources to excavate the past in this way, but they also knew exactly what they wanted to do with it. When the timber workers produced their oral history, the past was often no more than a vague sense of ‘in the old days’. The strongest elements in their presentation were its rich detailed folklore. When the conservationists deployed their archival sources, the past had exact precision of date, place and person and their presentation was skilfully calculated to cause the greatest political embarrassment.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, an important contrast between between timber worker history and that of the conservationists, was that the latter had no strong personal linkage with their constructed past. A few may have been able to identify with the early conservation pioneers, but for most conservationists, the most pressing linkages were always with future generations, not those of the past. Brian Wallace summed up his feelings thus:

I feel that everyone gains everytime there's a national park proclaimed, everytime there's a beach kept in its natural condition, everytime there's a rainforest saved ... that

then becomes something precious for generations to use and enjoy.

And Simon Frazer, a Tuntable Falls ‘treeworker’, argued in a similar vein:

we should be managing [the forests around here with respect] ... instead of treating it as an inheritance to be squandered. But respect would involve managing it so that it is there for the children’s children, for as long a time scale as you like to dare, really.

Increasingly the case in favour of rainforest conservation came to dominate the public debate in the media.<sup>16</sup> Their imagery of nature convinced many city dwellers that the ‘precious and beautiful rainforests’ should be spared.<sup>17</sup> However, ecology was out of place in the Cabinet Rooms of Parliament House; there economy reigned and the Labor ministers needed convincing that the threatened mill closures would not see them lose seats in rural electorates. As the next chapter will show, the conservationists were increasingly forced to develop a set of economic arguments to justify a halt to rainforest logging. In the course of this, their construction of history proved crucial. The conservationists’ portrait of an industry in decline, whose resource had been squandered and was now rapidly running out, not only offered an economic defence against their critics, but it also salved their own consciences over the actions they were taking.

They key element in this historical construction was that the timber workers were, in the words of Barry Peterson,

‘victims of history ... historical victims’

In Sally Johnston’s account of her dilemma, this view of history was crucial:

... my job wasn’t at risk, my livelihood wasn’t at risk so I could talk about [ecology] in some sort of removed way.

Which I realise was unfair. But you just have to think of the planet as a whole. And OK it seems like you're terribly academic and insensitive to their feelings but I just felt really deeply committed to that and I couldn't just ignore it. But of course I had to translate everything into economic terms and come up with alternatives for employment. And I really did believe at the time that there would be enough employment in tourism if not to replace those men at least to replace the numbers. But in fact, I don't think that has happened now. But all along I did feel that it was really bad for those men to suffer because they were just the end of a line of a century of destroying these forests and suddenly you get to the end of the line and the ones, the blokes at the end get axed really suddenly. And why should they pay when they weren't the main ones at fault. It was everybody else. And I felt that the conservationists, that everybody should have done more to support those blokes and not think of them as the enemy. Just think of them as the poor victims at the end of the line.

One of the consequences of seeing the timber workers as 'victims' was that it led many conservationists to view them in a passive light, as puppets controlled by outside forces. Brian Wallace, for example, explained the difficulty of communicating with timber workers:

the mill owners have got them, sort of, got their minds, you know, controlled. Because they've got them at the workplace, they've got them every day.

In Sally Johnston's words:

'they were just being fooled into thinking we were the problem'.

Similarly, the conservationists viewed many of the anti-conservation rallies staged by the timber industry, as well as the conservation

meetings which were ‘stacked’ by timber workers, as simply a product of manipulative mill managers. Tales of timber workers being bribed with beer, or pressured to attend, were common in conservationist circles.

The conservationist construction of history meshed neatly into their imagery of nature with its emotive rarity—the ‘last remnants’—and proved a powerful force in justifying their campaign to themselves. But within this construction of history the silences were stark. The simplistic view of their adversaries as ‘puppets’ made it difficult for many conservationists to acknowledge timber workers as complex human beings, with their own sophisticated conceptions of history and nature, and their own personal and legitimate fears about conservation politics.

The conservationist view of the hardwood industry’s restructuring was equally crude. When they drew the convenient conclusion, from Forestry Commission sources, that the mills were going to close anyway, the conservationists overlooked the complexity of industry restructuring. The adaptability of mills to changing resources and changing market conditions made many of the early Forestry Commission log supply projections obsolete. The Commission’s assessments of resources could be prone to revision in the light of new technologies and new marketing practices. Harry Walker, the Forestry Commission’s Assistant Commissioner during the 1970s, examined a number of early reports (1934, 1946, 1954) and pointed out that they had all wrongly prophesied impending ‘exhaustion of supplies’.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, it was not uncommon for the Forestry Commission to simply get their assessments wrong. In the 1940s, for example, the Amalgamated Timbers sawmill at Kookaburra, near Kempsey, extracted 30 million super feet of ‘excellent timber’ from an area assessed by the Forestry Commission as only holding 11 million super feet.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, the conservationists never fully acknowledged the threat they posed to rural employment. Their economic platitudes, such as the idea that the timber industry was dying, completely misunderstood the nature of restructuring within capitalist industries. Under capitalism, economic crises are cathartic for industry: they represent a period in history where marginal producers go the wall, while the larger more successful producers gain a new lease on life. While the industry itself moves towards a tighter monopoly structure,<sup>20</sup> the survivors of a period of restructuring emerge stronger and more dynamic than before.<sup>21</sup> Capitalist restructuring always involves job shedding but the long-term employment outcomes are dependent on a large number of factors, especially the extent to which the surviving firms expand their production in the period following restructuring. In the case of the north coast timber industry, several hundred jobs were lost through mill closures connected with the rainforest campaign. Hundreds of additional jobs were lost through the job shedding associated with restructuring.<sup>22</sup> However, the conservation impact was not restricted to the rainforest mills. As I will argue in chapter 6, the investment climate throughout the hardwood industry was seriously affected by conservation politics on the north coast.

## **Conclusion**

The American sociologist, Alvin Gouldner, has argued that one of the distinctive features of middle class professionals, a group he calls the New Class, is their access to the 'culture of critical discourse'.<sup>23</sup> He argues that the New Class are nurtured in an intellectual milieu where they gain not only specific academic and technical skills but also an attitude towards truth. For Gouldner, the 'culture of critical discourse' democratises truth because all claims must submit to equal scrutiny before it; no absolute authority can dictate the truth.'

The intellectual skills of this culture, particularly the research, writing and speaking skills, were crucial for the success of the rainforest conservationists. Whether haggling in the backrooms of Parliament House, chanting in the forests of northern NSW, or just sitting at the kitchen table writing letters or leaflets, the conservationists constantly employed these resources, assets which their working-class adversaries had never gained. At the same time, the self-critical dimension of this intellectual culture remained repressed much of the time. Some of the conservationists did have misgivings about their actions, and some did reflect on the predicament for the timber workers, but these were momentary lapses in a campaign characterised by an overpowering sense of self-righteousness. As the next chapter will show, this self-righteousness derived from a new absolutism: the ‘religion’ of ecology.

## CHAPTER 6

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### 'Five kids to feed': economy and ecology

At worst we cut off two years employment for those people, but at least we've got some rainforest.<sup>1</sup>

And we [conservationists] said, 'Well, why should we log it all out for the sake of two years'. And they [timber workers] just said, 'Well that's two years work to me mate, you know'.<sup>2</sup>

#### **A moral crusade?**

In order to 'rescue the rainforests', the conservationists not only fought to halt rainforest logging, but they also campaigned to wrest control of a number of forest wilderness areas from the Forestry Commission and have them preserved in national parks under the control of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. To achieve this end, the conservationists attempted to win wide public support in the cities and in this way gain the leverage needed to swing the balance within state cabinet in their favour. During their publicity campaign, the conservationists kept their focus exclusively on the issue of rainforest logging, promoting the theme that the 'last remnants' of fragile rainforests were due for imminent destruction.

While this public focus was always on *rainforest* logging, the real forestry agenda was more far-reaching. The forest areas sought by the conservationists for inclusion in national parks included extensive eucalypt hardwoods. These were viewed as essential 'buffer zones' for the rainforest species. By contrast, the Forestry Commission and the timber industry viewed the north coast forests as primarily mixed hardwoods and regarded the various rainforest species as 'invaders'.

These two different conceptions of the contested forest domain had major economic implications. Only a few mills were heavily reliant on rainforest timbers,<sup>3</sup> but a great many more were bound to be affected by large areas of hardwood being 'locked up' with the rainforest reserves. The local strategists within the conservation camp knew this very well. Brian Wallace, for example:

... there were these hardwood forests and rainforests all mixed up and in fact these roads that were going to snake through the Forbes River Valley were going to get far more hardwoods than they were going to get rainforest timbers, softwoods. And that was really the crucial thing. Heron's Creek, BMI and Adelaide Steamships, what they were concerned about was getting in to get those big big big hardwoods ... We also knew that that was the sleeping dragon. That was what it was really all about. They wanted to get their hands on those hardwoods.

And in the Washpool wilderness, west of Grafton, the areas sought by the conservationists contained three and half times as much hardwood timber as they did rainforest timber.<sup>4</sup>

Despite this more complex picture, the conservationists chose throughout the course of the campaign to keep the public focus on rainforests: lush greenery dominated the publicity handouts while the line that 'the mills were going to close anyway' was the cornerstone of their lobbying. This argument was only accurate

for the specific rainforest timbers allocated to a small number of plywood mills. It did not take account of the larger number of sawmills whose long-term viability was in jeopardy once large areas of mixed hardwoods were removed from timber production.

The industry lobby groups and the Forestry Commission responded to their predicament by vigorously invoking 'job blackmail'. In contrast to the images of rarity and beauty, these groups held up the images of industrial decay, redundancies and dole queues. It was a potent image, not only for the politicians in marginal seats<sup>5</sup> but generally amongst the ranks of the labour movement. During the recession of the mid-1970s and early 1980s, the traditional animosity between mental and manual workers was reshaped as a contempt by workers for 'trendy middle-class' activists. At the climax of the rainforest controversy, NSW Labor Council secretary Barrie Unsworth attacked the government's plans to stop rainforest logging as the argument of the 'new, middle, Volvo class'.<sup>6</sup> Later, in 1986 and 1987, when the Australian Forest Industries Association began a major public relations campaign to improve the image of the timber industry, this theme was further refined. The Association's first national television advertisement showed a conservationist roped to a tree to prevent logging of the forest. In response to the narrator's rational voice outlining the economic benefits of logging, particularly employment creation, the roped conservationist mindlessly repeated: 'I don't care'.

For many conservationists, a preoccupation with the ecological values of rainforest areas eclipsed economic issues such as rural unemployment and capitalist exploitation of workers. This focus was partly due to the traditional 'nature conservation' orientation of many of the activists, and partly due to a newly awakening interest in ecology, particularly amongst younger activists.

In many Western industrial societies, an ecological 'religion' had been growing steadily since the 1960s when doomsday ecology

first came to public prominence. In the mid-1970s, this religion came under attack from critics on the left. In 1974, for example, the Marxist writer Hans Magnus Enzensberger published a major critique of 'political ecology', largely in response to the claims of doomsday ecologists like Paul Ehrlich. Enzensberger argued persuasively that the original discipline of ecology, of a 'concept of mutual dependence and of a balance between all the inhabitants of an ecosystem' became controversial only when it decided to include a 'very particular species of animal ... man'. From this early flaw grew the possibility of a scientific discipline degenerating into a religion. As Enzensberger noted, the ecological movement retained its scientific aspects, mainly drawn from biology, but these were soon merged 'in an extremely confused alliance with a whole series of political motivations and interests'. Lying behind these interests were a number of 'socio-psychological needs ... hopes of conversion and redemption, delight in the collapse of things, feelings of guilt and resignation, escapism and hostility to civilization'.<sup>7</sup>

In the forests of Terania Creek, both the science and the religion of ecology were present. On the one hand, protesters came together to hear eminent rainforest biologists like Len Webb conduct workshops exploring the intricacies of rainforest ecosystems. On the other hand, alternative lifestyle mystics preached the virtues of communing with forests. It was amongst the alternative new settlers in particular that philosophies of deep ecology<sup>8</sup> were most strongly expressed. Simon Frazer, the treeworker from Tuntable Falls, explained his personal philosophy as: 'I'm only really trying to promote a responsible attitude to all other beings. I don't see that the planet was created just for species human'. This closer identification with other species, and the attempt to move beyond a human-centred perspective, invariably contradicted the more rationalist strands of scientific enquiry because it gave far greater

weight to emotional factors. Sally Johnston, for example, explained her feelings thus:

I'm really happy now that emotions are becoming a lot more legitimate so people's reactions to the devastation of forests is on an emotional level ... People [get an] ... emotional response to seeing these things brought down and what they look like when they fall and the way all the juice spurts out of them and it's really like a death of a person. And I think that's fair enough ... to think of that in terms of non-scientific reactions to logging of forests, I'm happy about that.

After Terania Creek, rainforest not only became a major public issue but a new urgency entered what had been a gradually unfolding campaign. The rainforest 'crisis' became the 1980s bearer of the doomsday ecology of the late 1960s, but this time the rarity and the 'impending extinction' of rainforests replaced the fears of pollution and over-population of that earlier era. The *Save Colong Bulletin* traditionally gave far more attention to wilderness philosophy than it did to deep ecology. But, soon after rainforest became *the* conservation issue of the day, it gave front page prominence to the following quote: 'What's happened is that the planet is beginning to say, "Don't abuse me. I'm not unlimited. I'm fragile. I must be cared for. I must be loved." Which is in a sense a very religious approach to the planet, and the men of science are beginning to believe it'.<sup>9</sup>

The major task of this book is to explore the cultural antagonism between middle-class conservationists and working-class timber communities. Yet as earlier chapters have shown, the forestry officers (as distinct from the forestry workers) were at the forefront of the timber industry's defence. Many of the younger foresters were themselves middle-class workers and shared much in common with their conservationist opponents (educational

background, work privileges etc). Whilst the major part of the conflict between foresters and conservationists was essentially a political and economic struggle over who should control the disputed resources (timber to the former, national parks to the latter), the *cultural antagonism* which divided the two groups was this split between science and religion. To the foresters, the scientific claims of the conservationists were often bogus. As Peter Markham put it:

We've heard the last stand of the rainforest, the last stand of mature blackbutt ... I've heard the last stand for twelve years and I'm still waiting to see the last stand ... Instead of being the last area of negro head beech or the last area of subtropical rainforest ... it's now the southern most occurrence or the northern most occurrence or the last habitat of the ... *ratus ratus* ... that's allegedly under threat.

When ecology became a religion, its evangelism germinated the seeds of middle-class self-righteousness, leading many conservationists to reject economic considerations as crass materialism. A strong sense of moral indignation characterised the utterances of many conservationists throughout the rainforest campaign. Brian Wallace, for example, saw conservation politics in terms of a crusade:

To me it's one of those great movements of the people. Similar to the movements to stop slavery or to abolish child labour or to free women. Those kind of broad social movements where you've got a cause that goes beyond party politics. It gets to the real heart of human philosophy and how we should live as human beings. And it's got broad appeal.

Alvin Gouldner has argued that the professional middle class, the New Class, have developed a particular ideology of professionalism in which 'altruism' and moral superiority are essential

elements of their self-perception. For Gouldner, the New Class uses its professional ideology as a way of gaining political legitimacy in its struggle with the traditional capitalist class which it is seeking to usurp:

Professionalism is one of the public ideologies of the New Class, and is the genteel subversion of the old class by the new ... professionalism is a tacit claim by the New Class to technical and moral superiority over the old class, implying that the latter lack technical credentials and are guided by motives of commercial venality. Professionalism silently installs the New Class as the paradigm of virtuous and legitimate authority, performing with technical skill and with dedicated concern for the society-at-large.<sup>10</sup>

While I would disagree with Gouldner's underlying argument (and I return to this issue in the last chapter), I think his linkage of professionalism and 'altruism' is a very useful insight. Particularly for middle-class environmental and peace activists, their cause lends itself to sentiments of moral superiority. In the case of the rainforest conservationists, it seemed to them so obvious that there could be no self-interest involved in rescuing such ecological treasures for future generations. In their own history of the campaign, the conservationists expressed this sentiment strongly: 'members of the voluntary conservation movement ... gave freely of their time and treasure in pursuit of an ideal ... Whereas the sawmillers feuded amongst themselves because of self-interest, the conservationists, motivated by altruism, differed only on tactics.'<sup>11</sup>

Particularly for those conservationists who chose to live alternative life styles, the contrast between their own frugal existence and the world of 'vote-grabbing' politicians, highly paid bureaucrats and 'rapacious' sawmillers, seemed stark indeed. These conservationists saw themselves as removed from the opportunism of their enemies; although sometimes forced to work at that corrupt

level, their real priorities were located on a higher plane. As Sally Johnston explained:

When I started reading about deep ecology I realised that's what I'd been on about for years. Always I'd the feeling with the forest that I was just fighting it for the forest's sake and for no other reason. And yet when you were talking to a politician you always had to translate that into terms of economics and his personal advantage and that sort of stuff which I thought wasn't the point. But I constantly had to talk in that language. Instead of what I felt really really strongly about. The rights of these things to exist in their rights without being beautiful for us or of use to us or whatever, just nothing to do with us. They had their own rights.

This contrast between self-interest and 'altruism', and the sense of moral superiority it engendered, had important implications for how the conservationists addressed the fundamental conflict between jobs and environment.

### **Job losses: a major dilemma**

Despite an overall preoccupation with the ecological dimension of their struggle, the key conservationists increasingly realised that economic arguments were essential in their political lobbying. As Bill Florey, a psychologist from Port Macquarie, recalled:

We were there talking about the beauty, pristine rainforest, the natural conservation values and all those sorts of things from a scientific, almost philosophical point of view ... But it was Frank who brought us down to earth and said, 'No, in terms of what we've got here, in terms of any solution it'll be ultimately a political solution since the government will have to act but it will also have to some concern and regard for what's going to happen to the workers'. That

then steered us. And he did his first survey of the Hastings looking at the Forestry management plans, trying to determine how accurate were they in terms of their assessment of the actual timber resource in this area ...

The 'Frank' mentioned here was Frank Littleford, whose commitment to forestry issues dated back to the early 1970s. As early as 1974 Frank approached the Secretary of the Timber Workers Union to alert him to the coming crisis:

I had a lot of things to say to him cause I'd actually analysed and studied the trends that were predicted for the timber industry. These were the trends put out by the FORWOOD conference, which was the conference of the industry. And I said to him, 'These are the trends, you know, surely we have a lot of common ground. Your workers stand to lose a lot of jobs ... Isn't there grounds for a cooperative sort of getting together sort of trying to work out common ground?'

He was not the slightest bit interested. Didn't want to know me.

Once the rainforest campaign reached the degree of animosity evident at Terania Creek, prospects for finding common ground had evaporated. Not only were the conservationists more ambitious in their demands, but the Forestry Commission, the mill managers and the workers were now fighting with their backs to the wall. As Paul Firestone, one of the conservationists involved in discussions with the sawmiller's association, recalled:

three meetings [were] held altogether to try and find common ground between the timber industry and the conservation groups ... we did find some common ground but we certainly weren't prepared at that stage to compromise our basic position that there should be no further rainforest logging, at all. We stuck to our guns on that ... <sup>12</sup>

When the Washpool wilderness joined the list of conservationist demands, the Grafton timber industry responded with their own confrontation: they bailed up a party of local and Sydney conservationists who were visiting the disputed forest areas. When the Grafton conservationists recalled the event, both the desperation of the timber workers, as well as their own ambitious desires, were evident:

*John Flynn:* ... when we finally came out of the bush ... there must have been 70 odd millers and workers and wives and many cars, trucks and things ... And that then developed into a bit of a shouting match and ... it was quite an agitated affair.

*Sarah Coombes:* ... we all went out to the big corner in the road and there was a bit of a razed bank and so one of the timber industry bloke jumped up on there and yells out, 'How much does you want?' That was the opening of the discussion.

*John Flynn:* This was great. I was thinking, 'All of it, thanks'.

*Sarah Coombes:* ... there were a couple of people who were pretty drunk from the industry side cause they'd had beer brought up with them. And some people were just absolutely rigid with anger.

The issue of finding common ground, of resolving the dilemma between jobs and the environment, was by no means universally shared amongst the rainforest conservationists. There were some for whom it was a burning issue; for others it was merely a tactical hurdle. Because of their close links with people living in timber communities, some of the long-time local conservationists found themselves confronting major personal dilemmas. Lismore lawyer Phil Woodrow, for example, was in daily contact with people in the timber industry, yet his conservation politics drew him into strong support for the rainforest campaign:

I can sympathise with them [timber workers]. You just can't disregard those people's feelings and the feelings of their families. That always worried me enormously ... I was able ... to see the effects if you suddenly stop an industry, the effects you have on people. And it's pretty disastrous. And this is an enormous conflict in my mind, too. On the one hand you've got the need ... to preserve and conserve and have national parks, and beautiful natural areas, and on the other hand, you've got the economic situation.

You're talking about individuals, not just jobs. And you're not talking about big companies and their profits, you're talking about some little guy with his family who suddenly finds he hasn't got an income anymore, who's on the dole, and suddenly can't pay off his house, his motor car, and all this, and he's in real trouble. This causes enormous problems. Certainly, as a conservationist, I felt this very keenly, and I think this is an enormous problem that one has to face if one gets into these conservation issues.

For other conservationists, however, job losses were no more than an inconvenient and temporary impediment for which the 'declining industry' argument provided a neat rationalisation. Suzie Browne and Patrick Jones, prominent in the Mt Nardi protests, recalled their attitude to the issue:

*Patrick Jones:* We knew we had about forty minutes before the police would get there. So we intended to halt the logging during that time ... We stood in front of the bulldozer ... [and then] I climbed on there [the bulldozer] ... And I said, 'Come on, I want to talk to you. Just stop for a minute. Just talk, you know.' And he took off his earmuffs and we had a talk for a while. And he had a bit to say and I had a bit to say and in the end ... we were friends almost.

*Interviewer:* What did you talk about?

*Patrick Jones:* I talked to him about what he was doing and why he was doing it and how he felt about it. He gave me his reasons, and he needed money, he needed an income, and he lived at Uki.

*Suzie Browne:* It was so often what it came down to. When you confronted these guys, they said, 'Look we don't really like this much either but we've got families, we've got mortgages, and we've got loans out and all these things. And our jobs are at stake.' And so, really, that was always the issue for them.

*Interviewer:* So how did you deal with that?

*Patrick Jones:* Well that's not good enough. We understand, but so what, this forest is age old, this forest had undisturbed ecological evolution since the beginnings of time. You can't come and smash it to pieces around here in one hour because you got to pay your finance bills.

*Suzie Browne:* Such a short time, I mean their jobs are short term anyway because they were limited anyway, so why [inaudible].

*Patrick Jones:* They knew they were in a declining industry and we knew they were in a declining industry ...

In his analysis of the middle class radicalism of the 1960s, the British sociologist Frank Parkin noted that most left-wing male activists were drawn from middle-class people working in the welfare and creative fields, rather than in the commercial or technological fields.<sup>13</sup> Australian research seems to endorse this view. A recent survey of industrial militancy amongst the 'new middle class' found that the highest commitment to 'society wide' industrial goals was shown by professional public sector workers like academics, teachers and social workers whilst the lowest commitment was amongst commercial sector workers like

accountants and bank officers and another grouping made up of journalists, nurses and surveyors.<sup>14</sup>

In the case of the NSW rainforest campaign<sup>15</sup> many of the activists who became involved were trained in the natural sciences and were motivated by the ecological issues at stake. Moreover, 'nature conservation' had no necessary left-wing implications and therefore self-employed professionals working outside the welfare field (such as lawyers, doctors and architects) felt comfortable fighting for rainforest preservation. Milo Dunphy, one of the main Sydney-based rainforest conservationists (and himself an architect), addressed the City branch of the Liberal Party during the rainforest campaign and argued that conservationists stood above party politics and were ready to support whichever party promised the most on conservation issues. In Dunphy's words: 'Something politicians of both sides find hard to accept is that many conservationists are first and foremost conservationists and only secondly political'.<sup>16</sup>

However, consistent with Parker's analysis, there were also a number of rainforest conservationists who had become active during the Vietnam moratorium campaign and transferred their left-wing sympathies to a range of other social issues during the 1970s (such as Aboriginal Land Rights and the anti-uranium campaign). For these people, rainforest was less a 'nature conservation' issue than a specific instance of a larger environmental conflict. They also saw a continuity in their enemies. The 'establishment' values of the 1960s, which lay behind the Vietnam war, had lost credibility in the cities but had remained dominant in the countryside. Thus the local councillors who impeded new settler dwelling plans; the off-road 'yobboes' who ruined the sand dunes; the 'cockies' who shot wildlife and the sawmillers who logged the forests; all these groups were linked in the eyes of these left-wing conservationists as the embodiment of 1960s 'establishment' values.

It was primarily amongst those left-wing conservationists who had been active during the 1960s and 1970s on a range of social issues, that the widening rift between timber workers and conservationists became an issue which demanded a personal response. During her time away from Grafton, Sarah Coombes had become active in student politics and in support for Aboriginal Land Rights. Returning home to work in the welfare field, Sarah found herself in a political climate unfavourable to left-wing social activism. Sarah recounted her futile attempts to bridge the gulf between conservationists and workers:

I was really angry that the people who worked in the industry were being deceived and manipulated and abused by management ... And I tried to make individual contact with people who worked in the industry but that was quite difficult ... when I did make contact and did exchange information, that information didn't get really considered by the union groups or the workers but just got handed on to management.

I did two sort of leaflets ... And I went to a timber rally and gave them out. One of them I was a bit scared about handing out because I thought I'd get labelled a communist because of it, so I didn't even show the others it ... one of them had a big fat capitalist talking about and weighing up jobs and rainforest. And the point that I was trying to make was that the big fat capitalist didn't care about jobs or the rainforest and I sort of tried to put in a few figures about changes in the timber industry that had occurred and the reasons for decreasing employment opportunities in the industry ...

After, I found that the issue got too hot to have that individual contact with the workers, and there was no union structure ... [The Trades and Labour Council had] been defunct for about fifteen years ... There was

nothing, there was no contact point apart from individual contact and that was really difficult. I used to ring up some of the workers that worked at the mill at home but I felt like I was invading their personal space, their privacy, and we had no neutral ground to meet on. And I had no status in terms of unions or anything either. Like I belong to a union that's not even properly registered yet.

Sarah did eventually gain a hearing from the unions, but it was to no avail. To the male timber workers, people like Sarah represented the intrusion of values which they could not respect. Sarah was just one more articulate middle-class feminist carrying theoretical knowledge:

I did meet some of the union reps but that didn't last long. Those meetings, they weren't very fruitful and I thought it was sorta false, because there wasn't anything that I could offer them. Cause ... every time I brought up things that I'd read in reports or heard from other areas about alternatives in terms of technology, and other sorts of timbers that could be used instead of rainforest timbers, then they would just laugh at me and tell me that I didn't know what I was talking about and that I had no credibility with them because I was just me who worked in a women's refuge and what did I know. So anything I tried to raise that I'd read about, I didn't have the credibility to get that across.

Was that partly also that you'd read it and didn't have practical experience? *[Interviewer]*

Yes, yes, absolutely. And also because they were older and men, and all that sort of stuff.

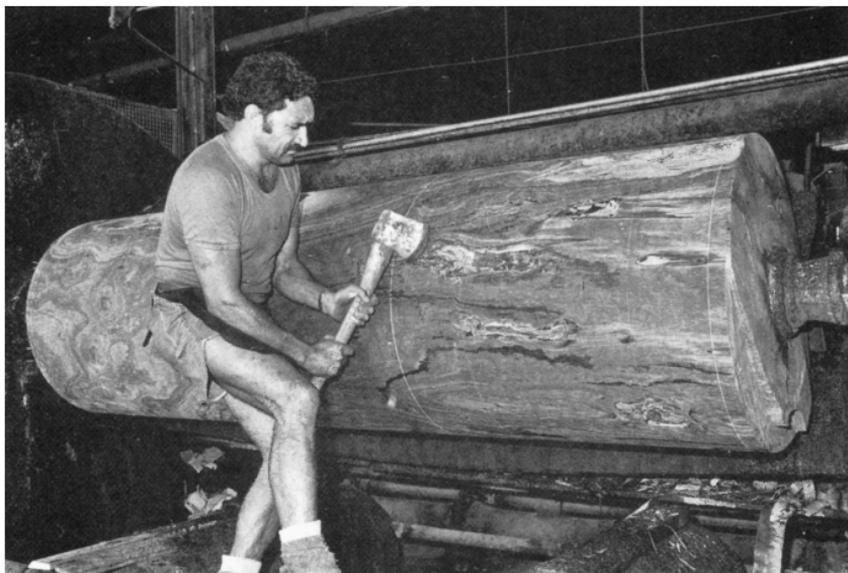
Despite her best intentions, Sarah's efforts highlighted the fundamental weaknesses of the rainforest conservationists' response to the economic issues at stake.

## Economic proposals

The economic proposals which the rainforest conservationists eventually assembled were purely tactical, not practical. They were only needed to swing the balance within cabinet and to ward off the rebuke of their critics. At the beginning of 1980, the *National Parks Journal* published an article on Terania Creek<sup>17</sup> which had two major sections: 'Terania Creek Economics' and 'Regional Economics'. However, the first article merely contested the figures given by the Forestry Commission for the costs of roading Terania Creek basin. The second article challenged the Forestry Commission's language and its employment multiplier (that is, the additional jobs dependent on logging). The conservationists argued that there would be no adverse effects on employment if Terania Creek was not logged. Further detailed material on regional economics was totally absent.

Moreover, what was missing from the analysis (and from many others) was an awareness of corporate investment strategies. Whenever conservationists took a set of particular statistics and then made simple projections from them, they ignored the long-term implications for sawmillers of the rainforest campaign. In their own assessment of Terania Creek the conservationists saw it as a watershed, but in their economic analyses they failed to recognise that the timber industry also watched with bated breath for the outcome. For the industry it was not simply the loss of 6000 cubic metres of timber, it was the long term reliability of supply that was at stake.<sup>18</sup>

In some of their other economic analyses, conservationists produced far more detailed materials, including proposals for tourism and reforestation programs.<sup>19</sup> The former were sometimes little more than forward projections from census figures for the region and did not directly address the issue of the immobility



A timber worker peeling a rainforest log on a veneer lathe at the Yarras plymill, near Wauchope. Conservationists suggested timber workers could be re-employed in the tourist industry. The local paper asked if this meant swapping their leather aprons for linen ones. (Photo by courtesy of the *Hastings Gazette*.)

of labour. By their background and training, timber workers were only suited to a small number of potential tourist jobs (such as coach drivers or ‘living relics’). Moreover, the cultural resistance to moving from the ‘masculine jobs’ found in the timber industry to the kinds of ‘feminine jobs’ associated with tourism was entirely overlooked by the conservationists. A graphic instance of this occurred during the Hastings campaign when the local Wauchope newspaper published a photo of a leather-aproned timber worker peeling a rainforest log on a veneer lathe. The caption caustically noted that this worker would be swapping his leather apron for a linen one if the conservationists got their way!

Where timber workers could have been more easily relocated were within reforestation programs. Conservationists were

particularly enthusiastic about tree planting programs and argued strongly for such 'investments in our future'.<sup>20</sup> Yet the reasons why significant expenditure on reforestation had not eventuated on the north coast—the Forestry Commission's commitment to pine plantations—had not changed. Moreover, by the late 1970s and early 1980s increasingly tight government budgets spelt doom for any hope that funds against the future could be set aside in the present. Throughout the rainforest campaign the employment proposals of the conservationists remained theoretical and programmatic. At times they were well researched, in terms of scrutinising Forestry Commission management plans, but as feasible proposals for actual job creation they were inadequate. These inadequacies stemmed partly from the conservationists' own failings and partly from the constraints of the local situation. The conservationists did not attempt any detailed financial planning for their alternative employment strategies and they were unable to link in with regional economic bodies because these were dominated by timber industry sympathisers. A few committed individuals worked conscientiously on detailed economic analyses, but the majority of conservationists preferred to see the issue as a land management dispute, leaving the consequences of their actions to the politicians. Paul Firestone, for example, defended his position in this way:

It's a decision that government needs to make, whether it's more important to preserve an area or to log an area and to take the necessary steps to see that no section of the community is disadvantaged by a political decision. That's a nettle that the government has failed to grasp.

You don't think the onus was on the conservation movement to work out very detailed alternative proposals?  
[Interviewer]

No, never was. No, I've always taken the view that that decision is for those who actually decide the future of the

forests ... The timber industry was not concerned one iota about conservation of other areas. Why should we be concerned about finding alternatives for them? ... I've never seen it as a responsibility of conservationists ... to try and find alternatives. It certainly increases your chances of winning if you can find alternatives and I think that was a strategy that was adopted. But I think it was a mistaken belief that we should, of necessity, find viable alternatives.

By contrast, Rachel Winter felt she had to personally intervene. As she saw it:

I felt it was important to go [to talk to the workers] because I genuinely did care about what happened to the workers and I'd been saying it all along.

But when she visited the local mill and tried to establish a dialogue with the mill workers, the weaknesses of the conservationist position became evident. There was nothing in the way of concrete economic proposals that she could offer to the workers who were facing the loss of their jobs. Later, she met with the local union organiser, but the situation was still the same:

He said, 'Much of what you've been saying is quite true. I know that a lot of things you've been saying are the case' ... things ... like the management had been leading them up the garden path and hadn't told them that the Forestry Commission plans were that the mill would be closed down ... He felt that they weren't getting a lot of support from the union and he just wanted to explore ways ... in which they could perhaps get a better deal out of it. Like severance pay ... for when it was going to finish. They were working pretty hard on that and were not very hopeful of getting anything on that ...

We arranged to meet and we met in a park in Wauchope [laughs] which is a funny place to meet because it's terribly

public ... and to be able to be seen by everybody in Wauchope that the two of us were talking [laughs] ... We couldn't really get anywhere. I couldn't offer him anything.

As with Sarah's efforts in Grafton, both women found that they 'had nothing to offer'. The detailed economic planning, local financial resources and organisational structures were not part of their package: they offered only their personal concern and their more detailed knowledge.

## **Conclusion**

The jobs versus environment predicament that surfaced during the north coast rainforest campaign was symptomatic of a larger predicament that has enmeshed environmental politics generally. In his analysis of 'new social movements', Claus Offe has observed: 'Movements are incapable of negotiating because they do not have anything to offer in return for any concessions made to their demands. They cannot promise, for instance, lower levels of energy consumption in return for the discontinuation of nuclear energy projects in the way trade unions can promise (or at least practice) wage restraint in return for employment guarantees.'<sup>21</sup>

Few conservationists were prepared to 'bargain' in this way. For example, in the mid-1980s as the Eden woodchip controversy resurfaced, one of the prominent Sydney rainforest conservationists declared that the demands of the conservationists were simply not negotiable.<sup>22</sup> Middle-class moral superiority combined with a passionate concern for ecology to fuel the vision that conservationists were defending a cause far greater than the sectional interests of the other parties in the dispute. As Offe noted: 'Movements are also unwilling to negotiate because they often consider their central concern of such high and universal priority that no part of it can be meaningfully sacrificed (e.g., in issues linked to the values of 'survival' or 'identity') without negating the concern itself.'<sup>23</sup>

Because conservationists had nothing material to offer in their political bargaining with government and industry, they offered threats instead, particularly the threat of media pressure. Throughout the latter stages of the rainforest campaign, threats of 'more Terania Creeks' became a regular part of the conservationists' armoury. And, to this day, conservationists have regularly resorted to forest confrontations in every state on the east coast of Australia.

## CHAPTER 7

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### Common ground?

It is always difficult to suggest answers to what are intractable problems. As this book has demonstrated, the deeper roots of the conflict between timber workers and conservationists derive from structural features of contemporary Australian society which are not amenable to change. Nevertheless, there are a number of areas where minor changes might minimise the severity of these conflicts. In what follows, I offer a number of tentative suggestions along these lines. I then conclude by reviewing the major structural limitation—the class structure of contemporary capitalism—which impedes progress in diminishing conflict.

#### **Timber workers**

For workers in the timber industry, their lack of job security was the most important impediment to their acceptance of ecological arguments about what their industry was doing to the forests of northern NSW. Even had they possessed greater knowledge of ecology, timber workers would not have had the freedom to question the directions their industry was taking. By way of contrast, it is worth briefly examining one example of how favourable

economic conditions, when combined with an enlightened trade union leadership, contributed to environmental consciousness taking root amongst some sections of the urban working class.

In the 1960s and early 1970s the NSW branch of the Builders' Labourers Federation (BLF) came under the control of a left-wing leadership, among them Jack Munday, Jack Owens and Bob Pringle. They initiated a number of major reforms aimed at making the union more democratic and overhauling the poor working conditions which had prevailed in the construction industry.<sup>1</sup> In 1971 the BLF became involved with resident action groups who were fighting against the redevelopment of their neighbourhoods by large property developers. The union applied black bans to prospective building developments which residents believed would have destructive environmental outcomes. These bans were later renamed 'Green Bans' and, in the period between 1971 and 1975, 42 such bans were applied and \$5 billion worth of construction was delayed.<sup>2</sup> A large number of these bans were on historic buildings and on open space, but a significant number were also aimed at preventing the destruction of low income housing in Sydney's inner city, particularly in the Rocks and in Victoria Street. This environmental stand on the part of the BLF was closely linked to the kinds of democratic reforms which the leadership had been forging within the union.<sup>3</sup> As Pringle and Munday pointed out: 'More and more workers will become increasingly concerned with the end result of their work. Already a growing number of workers are demanding a greater say, a greater control over their working lives, and are insisting that the work performed should be socially beneficial to the community as a whole.'<sup>4</sup>

What made this stand possible at the time was the favourable economic climate. In the early 1970s Sydney was undergoing a rapid building boom and the demand for labour in the construction industry was very high. It was feasible to place bans on particular

sites because the workers could easily find work on other sites. By the mid-1970s, circumstances had changed and unemployment in the construction industry had begun to rise substantially.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the property developers and the State government had formed an alliance with the Federal leadership of the BLF to end the reign of the radical NSW leadership. The subsequent deregistration of the New South Wales branch of the BLF and the intervention by the Federal branch effectively ended the Green Bans movement. Under these changed economic conditions, and with their radical leadership expelled from the union, rank and file support for the continuation of the Green Bans declined.

Despite their brief life-span, the Green Bans did highlight how the linkages between economy and ecology might be fashioned in enlightened ways. Jack Munday noted that: 'it is the belief of our members that quality of life is made and obtained day by day; that the problem of conservation is part of our daily battle to survive'.<sup>6</sup>

For the north coast timber workers however, the 'battle to survive' entailed adopting an unquestioning attitude towards their sawmilling bosses and the Forestry Commission officers. To attain the kind of freedom that the BLF drew upon in its Green Bans period, the timber workers in the hardwood industry would need to see major changes take place in their industry.

Specifically, timber workers would need a stronger and more effective union, so that their basic industrial needs, particularly higher wages, job security and better working conditions, could be met. Secondly, the hardwood timber industry would need a more secure niche within the rural economy. In regions with little economic diversity, manual workers are highly vulnerable to the loss of their livelihood when job shedding occurs in industries undergoing restructuring. Particularly for timber workers, there is little prospect of their transferring to the major growth areas in

their local economies, activities like tourism, property development and financial services. Consequently, their job security hinges on the timber industry restructuring in such a way that the timber workers' existing skills can still be utilised (and enhanced). More value-added production within the hardwood timber industry is one of the major avenues for this. Utilising the forests for furniture timbers and other speciality timbers would enable the hardwood industry to carve out a market niche which would not be vulnerable to the extreme competitiveness involved in supplying the building industry. Furthermore, the higher returns from selling in this kind of market would allow timber firms to pay both higher wages to their workers and higher prices for their log supplies. The latter would encourage greater efforts towards sustained yield within the State Forests and would also promote the planting of hardwood plantations on a larger scale.

As well as these economic changes, timber workers would need greater exposure to ecological perspectives which see forests as more than just trees. When the timber workers in this book argued that the forests regrew after logging, they were right in crude terms. But whether the full diversity of plants returned after logging was a different matter. And whether the habitat for all the fauna in that piece of forest was fully restored was also not addressed in the 'forests regrow' argument. To some extent, timber workers were pushed into a corner by the media strategy of the rainforest conservationists. To win public support, the conservationists 'marketed' the beauty of the north coast rainforests. As chapter 5 showed, the conservationists were fortunate in promoting a commodity which had great appeal to middle-class urban dwellers. The skilful use of glossy posters and postcards, as well as sympathetic television footage, brought the lushness of sub-tropical rainforests into urban living rooms. At the same time, to bring home the urgency of their cause, conservationists also

highlighted the destruction caused by logging. They followed a time-honoured tradition in forestry conservation campaigns of publishing photographs of destructive forestry operations, particularly the immediate after-effects of clear felling. Privately, some conservationists admitted the inaccuracy of these images, but they continued to use them because of their strong propaganda value in mobilising public opinion. However, as chapter 4 highlighted, it was this imagery of destruction which most offended timber workers and foresters. A major part of their construction of nature and history was based on a rebuttal of the imagery of destruction. Consequently, the likelihood that timber workers would be amenable to ecological arguments was minimal once they had retreated into such a defensive position.

The area from which ecology might most easily enter the lives of timber workers is from within their own communities. As chapter 4 noted, both timber workers and foresters regarded themselves as conservationists and drew upon local history to argue their credentials. This self-perception would need both endorsement and extension. Endorsement would bring the confidence to move out of the defensive corner; extension would see the definition of what counts as ecological damage widened to include habitat destruction. For this to happen, external abuse would need to be replaced by local dialogue, in which the common ground between both parties could be explored.

The major obstacles to this strategy remain the hostility of conservative rural communities to newly arrived outsiders and the incompatibility between rival conceptions of conservation. For most members of traditional rural communities, conservation is defined in terms of the 'wise use' of resources.<sup>7</sup> But for many new settlers, particularly those following deep ecology principles,<sup>8</sup> conservation means not utilising the resources at all.

## Conservationists

The major focus of the north coast conservationists during the rainforest campaign (and this also applied to their campaign against sandmining on north coast beaches) centred on establishing national parks. Elsewhere in Australia the strategy has been similar. The opponents of the Eden wood chipping operations and the East Gippsland conservationists also worked towards the establishment of national parks. The Tasmanian and North Queensland conservationists pursued essentially the same goal, using the strategy of World Heritage listing. From the conservationist point of view, enclosing forests, rivers and beaches within the boundaries of national parks was the only guarantee that endangered areas would be protected from 'rapacious' rural industries.

However, national parks were more than just a pragmatic or technical solution to a land use dispute. They also represented the embodiment of the 'disinterested altruism' of middle-class activists. As the conservationists saw it, establishing national parks would rescue precious resources for future generations from greedy capitalists, short sighted unionists, venal politicians, and environmentally abusive farmers. As chapters 5 and 6 showed, the conservationists saw themselves as motivated by 'altruism' and a genuine concern for wilderness and endangered species. Yet such a perspective failed to acknowledge how much national parks were seen as playgrounds for the urban middle class by their rural neighbours who noted with scorn that many conservationists were recruited from the bushwalking fraternity. Had the same forest areas been protected within forest reserves under the control of the Forestry Commission, the debates about which areas to log and which areas to save would probably have still been as contentious. But, the sense of loss, of viewing the forests as 'locked up', was intensified for rural timber communities by the alien presence which national

parks symbolised. Many timber workers noted that they, and their colleagues, would be loathe to fight any bushfires that might break out in the national parks but they would unquestioningly fight any fires in state forests. The national parks strategy of the conservationists failed to come to terms with the reality of economic survival for many country people living in depressed rural economies. For conservationists, fragile ecologies took precedence over fragile economies.

The conservationists failed to pursue the economic aspects of forestry management and timber industry restructuring and left the political initiative firmly with industry capitalists. Once the rainforest battle was won, pressures to deal with the regional economic crisis on the north coast dissipated. There were no concrete outcomes from the momentum toward regional economic revival which had been implicit in the 'industry in decline' arguments. Instead, there was an acceleration of the process of capitalist restructuring outlined in chapter 1. Similarly, despite an awareness of the occupational hazards and hardship of the timber industry, conservationists made no serious attempts to improve the well-being of workers in the timber industry.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, because securing national parks was the ultimate goal, all the strategies along the way were dispensable. Despite repeated calls to overhaul the Forestry Commission,<sup>10</sup> once the national parks were established, the pressure to reform that state bureaucracy was lifted.

The focus on national parks also had an effect in the cities. The conservationists' preoccupation with establishing national parks allowed the State government to pursue unhindered economic developments which were environmentally destructive in the cities. As Jim McClelland, former Chief Judge of the New South Wales Land and Environment Court, declared at a Planning Seminar in 1986: 'I accuse the Wran government of hiding behind its admittedly good record in expanding the State's National

Parks, in order to throw a smokescreen over its heavy-handed, authoritarian approach to urban developments.’<sup>11</sup> And Jack Munday noted that the Labor Government’s approach could be described as ‘pristine wilderness for nature conservationists and their National Parks, but urban blight for urban environmentalists fighting for a liveable urban environment’.<sup>12</sup>

Both critics pointed to the regular overturning of environmental legislation by executive government decisions so as to allow large-scale urban redevelopments to proceed against the wishes of local councils. The force of these criticism were shown dramatically in March 1987 when the Unsworth Labor Government sacked the Sydney City Council. Despite its strange mixture of radical and conservative independents, the Sydney City Council had become a thorn in the side of the state government because it continued to resist the partnership between developers and government to radically transform Sydney’s central business district in the interests of the finance and tourist industries.

Yet these urban issues of the mid-1980s have been largely tangential to the major directions taken by environmental politics. After their victories in the NSW rainforest campaign and the Franklin Dam campaign, mainstream conservationists continued to highlight nature conservation, particularly forestry issues and mining in national parks. In early 1988 the Unsworth Government declared new national parks in the south of the state and introduced Wilderness legislation, two of the key demands of the nature conservationists. At the same time, Premier Unsworth remained implacably opposed to any concessions on the major urban environmental issues: the Sydney monorail, the redevelopment of Darling Harbour and the Sydney Harbour Tunnel. As with the earlier rainforest decisions, the national parks decision saw small-scale rural industry sacrificed for urban votes, while within

the urban environment the vital decisions remained in the hands of large corporate (and international) interests.

Urban issues have always been poor cousins in that family of issues which have preoccupied Australian conservationists. In the last decade and a half, *Habitat*, the official journal of the Australian Conservation Foundation, has almost exclusively concentrated on flora and fauna conservation in natural areas. Only in the mid-1970s did it devote entire issues to urban questions and this was partly because of the impetus provided by the Green Bans movement.<sup>13</sup> The most consistent concern with urban environmental issues has come from left-wing conservationists, and from the traditional left. Friends of the Earth, the most socially radical of the environment groups of the 1970s and 1980s, regularly analysed major urban issues. And it was the Communist Party of Australia, through their stimulating booklet, *Make Melbourne Marvellous* (released in 1985), who made the most significant theoretical contribution to urban environmental issues. With its idea of neighbourhood centres, linked by an expanded public transport system, providing a 'cluster' for local social activities, this left-wing urban strategy aimed to break down the terrible isolation of the suburbs, particularly for women and children.<sup>14</sup>

In the late 1980s, with the housing crisis at its most extreme since the 1930s, and with urban environmental issues of greater concern to more working-class Australians than any other environmental issue,<sup>15</sup> mainstream conservationists redoubled their efforts in their traditional domain of forest conservation. Major campaigns in Tasmania and on the south coast of New South Wales rekindled images of Terania Creek on television screens around the country.

The greatest chance for healing the rift between members of the manual working class and middle-class activists lies in common struggles around urban environmental issues. It is in the cities of

Australia that the class dimension of environmental destruction is most readily apparent. As Jack Munday argued persuasively:

it is said that workers have 'no right in', or 'are not interested in' environmental issues. This is a myth, dangerous as well as wrong ... workers are the section of the community first and most affected, when the environment is ravaged. Who lives in the most polluted areas of a city? Who bears the heaviest noise levels? Who lives in the least congenial areas? The financially less endowed, of course.<sup>16</sup>

The French social movement theorist, Manuel Castells, has argued convincingly that co-operation between these two groups is possible if they centre around the defence of the social wage. Castells has argued that as the labour movement grew in strength under advanced capitalism the direct wages of workers became increasingly supplemented by collective goods and services 'which often become more important for the popular living standard than the nominal amount of direct wages'.<sup>17</sup> For this reason, threats to the 'collective consumption' of the working class have considerable potential to mobilise working-class communities in new and powerful ways. Castells concludes that the city can provide the terrain on which the common ground between the working class and (what he calls) 'the new petty bourgeoisie' can be developed: 'it is in urban protest that they most easily discover a similarity of interests with the working class, and a common opposition to the logic of the system'.<sup>18</sup>

But what about the countryside? Is there potential there for middle-class activists to develop common ground with the rural working class and with small farmers? As the discussion above has just highlighted, it is in the area of shared problems that common goals can be forged. The major ecological problems that rural communities face—such as soil degradation through salinity, erosion and loss of topsoil—are also major economic problems, seriously

jeopardising future production. Already, another set of ecological problems—pesticide and herbicide contamination—threatens to become an economic problem as markets are lost in a world of increasingly health-conscious consumers. In many respects, the new settlers in these communities have pioneered sound ecological responses to these problems. With their permaculture approach, particularly their composting methods and their reforestation activities, new settlers have been able to repair some of the degraded dairy farmland in northern NSW. At the same time, many new settlers have reaped high market returns for their produce by using organic methods of pest and weed control in its cultivation.

However, how far these ecological responses have also been viable economic responses is difficult to say. In an era of agriculture increasingly under the sway of intensive farming and agribusiness economics,<sup>19</sup> the scope for conventional farmers to swing 180° is limited. Particularly if they are producing conventional crops (rather than the speciality products favoured by the new settlers), the pressure on farmers to adopt high-volume, low-cost production methods is intense.

Nevertheless, one of the answers to the chasm between traditional farmers and new settlers lies in increased dialogue around these shared ecological and economic problems. One example of where this has begun to occur is in the area of local credit provision. The Maleny Community Credit Union in southern Queensland was set up to act as a ‘revolving loan fund’, a way of keeping local savings within the regional economy so as to promote local economic development. Established by new settlers in the area, the credit union was initially regarded as a ‘hippie bank’ by the long-term residents. However, because of its more flexible lending procedures, the credit union gradually won support from these long term residents, some of whom became borrowers. This example suggests that if local mechanisms to deal with economic

problems can be developed, new settlers can win acceptance within more conservative rural societies.

In the case of timber workers and conservationists the underlying principle remains the same. Timber workers and conservationists confront shared ecological and economic problems, particularly the depletion of the more valuable forest resources. This depletion limits the life of local mills, threatening retrenchments, and it also puts pressure on the Forestry Commission to open more areas for logging. By promoting a value-added timber strategy, conservationists could address these problems. This occurred in Victoria in 1986 when a group of conservationists, the East Gippsland Coalition, produced an alternative timber industry plan for that region (*Jobs in East Gippsland*). Aimed at keeping the woodchippers out of East Gippsland, this industry plan was developed in consultation with the local sawmilling industry and aimed at establishing new forest based industries (seasoning plants, a veneer plant, a woodcraft centre) as well as appropriate changes in forest management practices to implement this new direction.<sup>20</sup> The *Jobs in East Gippsland* strategy developed in a political climate conducive to dialogue between conservationists and the timber industry. The Cain Labor Government had initiated a major public inquiry into forestry in 1984 (the Ferguson Inquiry) and had also reformed its bureaucracy to make it more publicly accountable in the areas of forestry and conservation. However, across the border, in NSW, the political climate under the Greiner Liberal Government does not favour similar industry strategies and this leaves the conservationists—even were they willing to try—in a weak position to undertake an economic dialogue with the timber industry.

Under favourable political conditions ‘environmental mediation’ holds some promise for enhancing dialogue between conservationists and the timber industry. This approach has had some success in the United States during the last decade and attempts to

go beyond the shortcomings of resolving conflict through the law courts. Litigation, with its tendency to produce only winners and losers, is unsuited to producing equitable environmental outcomes. Instead, a process of mediation between the warring parties is attempted. A neutral mediator convenes extensive dialogue between the two parties with the object of providing a forum for communication in the hope that common ground can be identified. This approach promotes a fuller understanding by each party of the other's perspectives and problems. As Alana Knaster noted in her discussion of the mediation process between the timber industry and conservationists in the United States:

Although [they] began as bitter enemies, the long process of working together to learn about one another's concerns and to jointly ask scientists to evaluate alternatives to the practices that divided them ideologically enabled the members to find common ground.

Environmentalists, confronted with the potential crisis that a cessation in logging would have for the timber-dependent communities and schools, realized that they had to move towards a gradual reduction in harvesting as opposed to an immediate moratorium. They did not want to be considered responsible for creating a new endangered species, 'the Washington State logger'. The timber and logging industries came to appreciate that the forests needed protecting and agreed that change in both the distribution of logging activities and more sound environmental practices were necessary if logging were to continue.<sup>21</sup>

Would environmental mediation be likely to succeed in Australia? While advances might be made at the organisational peak level on a number of environmental issues, such as soil conservation and logging,<sup>22</sup> a stumbling block would remain at the grassroots level. The parties involved in the mediation process would need

to win acceptance for their compromise from their respective constituencies. Yet, as the foregoing chapters have shown, both timber workers and conservationists would be loathe to see their interests 'sold out'. Moreover, the underlying hostility between both groups, on the ground, would not be dissipated by a mediation process conducted at a peak level. To understand why promising approaches, such as joint industry strategies and mediation processes, are still problematic we need to consider the major structural limitation that undercuts the prospects for finding common ground.

### **Structural limitations**

The conflicts between timber workers and conservationists which have been the focus of this book have not been confined to Australia. In the United States, for example, explosive conflicts have erupted over forestry issues. During the controversy surrounding the Redwoods National Park expansion, timber workers denounced 'preservationists' for bringing 'absolute death and destruction to the economic growth and future of this state'.<sup>23</sup> Bumper stickers on the cars of Californian construction workers highlighted the bitterness engendered by environmental controversies in that state: 'Eat a Greenie for Breakfast'.<sup>24</sup> Nor have these conflicts been confined to environmental issues. During the period of the Vietnam war, both in Australia and in the United States, middle-class activists were prominent in the anti-war movement. But it was working-class youth who mostly went to fight the war and it was their working-class peers at home who supported the war.

As I have stressed throughout this book, this hostility between manual workers and middle-class activists reflects not simply the dynamics of the particular issue in conflict. It also reflects a deeply

rooted animosity borne out of the intellectual division of labour which is dominant in advanced capitalist societies. Mental labour is invariably rewarded with higher incomes, better working conditions and greater social prestige than is manual labour. Particularly since World War II, this division within the world of work has spread both deeper and wider within society. Major changes in the industrial structure of the Australian economy have combined with a massive expansion in secondary and tertiary education to radically transform the occupational structure. As Table 7.1 shows, professional occupations have increased their share of the workforce by more than half during the 1960s and 1970s, whilst the shares taken by industrial workers and rural workers have dropped dramatically. If a number of the occupations in Table 7.1 are broadly grouped into 'white-collar' and 'blue-collar',<sup>25</sup> it emerges that the latter group have decisively lost their dominant position in the economy to the former group (see Figure 7.1).

These occupational changes have been accompanied by major social changes, as middle-class workers have come to dominate more areas of social and political life. Their high incomes have allowed middle-class workers to buy and renovate old houses in traditional working-class inner city suburbs. In so doing, they have 'gentrified' those suburbs, making them too costly for the working class to remain there.<sup>26</sup> On another level, middle-class workers have increasingly swelled the ranks of the Labor Party and the trade unions, rising to positions of power in both arenas. In both cases, manual workers have seen themselves displaced from their traditional domain by what they see as 'middle class trendies'. During the 1985–86 Queensland power worker's dispute, one sacked power worker lashed out bitterly at the Australian Council of Trade Unions' weak support for the striking workers: 'Those people in the ACTU are a bunch of academics who've never been on the shop floor in their life and don't have a clue

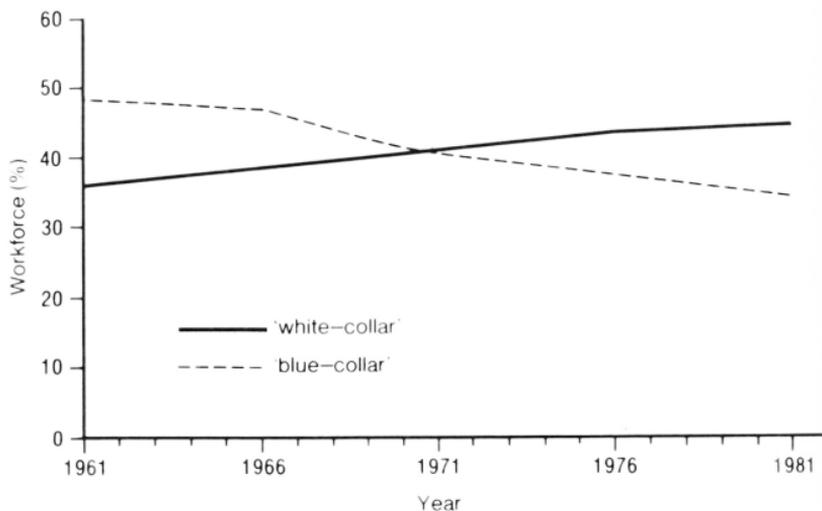
Table 7.1: Percentage of workers in various occupations: CCLO Major Groups, Australia 1961 to 1981

	1961	1966	1971	1976	1981
Professional, technical etc	8.4	9.3	10.2	11.8	13.6
Administrative, executive & managerial	7.1	6.3	6.7	6.6	5.3
Clerical	13.0	14.7	15.8	16.5	17.1
Sales	7.6	7.7	8.1	7.8	8.5
Farmers, fishermen, timber getters etc	11.1	9.7	7.7	7.4	6.4
Miners, quarrymen etc	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.6
Transport & communications	6.4	6.1	5.5	5.2	4.8
Craftsmen, production process & labourers	36.3	35.5	32.1	29.9	28.1
Service, sport & recreation	7.0	7.4	7.4	7.8	8.4
Members of armed services	1.0	1.2	1.2	1.1	1.0
Inadequately described or not stated	1.3	1.6	4.6	5.5	6.1

Note: The Classification and Classified List of Occupations (CCLO) was the main system used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for classifying occupations prior to the 1986 Census. It has now been replaced by the Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO). While the ASCO is a better system than the CCLO, it is necessary to use the latter if historical statistics are involved.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics *Census of Population and Housing Australia, 1961 to 1981*

Figure 7.1: Percentage of workers in 'white collar' and 'blue collar' occupations:  
Australia 1961 to 1981



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics *Census of Population and Housing Australia, 1961 to 1981*

about what it's really like'.<sup>27</sup> And a survey released in early 1989 of public perceptions of trade unions has borne this out: 'Many union members fear that the union hierarchy, particularly the ACTU leadership, has lost touch with the ordinary concerns of ordinary workers'.<sup>28</sup>

To understand this process of class 'displacement' we need to more fully explore what is meant by the term 'middle class'. In mainstream sociology, where class is defined in terms of 'socioeconomic' status, the middle class is simply one tier in a large grid of pigeon holes. The gradations possible between and within different groups—such as 'upper middle class' and 'lower middle class'—reflect the mainstream sociological view that class is really only about slotting people into categories, which can then be related to their possession of various social attributes, things like housing, education, income, 'attitudes' and so on. By contrast, Marxist theories of class are more ambitious. Marxists attempt to use the concept of class to go beyond mere classification and to provide an analysis of the dynamics of social change. In this context, social classes are intimately tied into the system of production prevailing in particular historical societies. Marxists argue that one class, the capitalist class, historically constitutes its opposite class, the working class. In the course of this process, economic struggles over profits, wages and control over production, infuse political struggles developing in other areas of society. While the more sophisticated Marxist theories do not suggest that all conflicts in society are derived from economic relations, they still nevertheless see class struggle as pivotal in shaping social change. Where the taxonomies used in sociology provide a wide spectrum of social classes, Marxist approaches are more suited to analysing societies with polarised classes. Consequently, groups of people who do not seem to be strictly either capitalists or workers are more problematic for Marxists.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, understanding class seemed quite simple. Both Marxists and mainstream sociologists could perceive a small, but growing, group of wealthy capitalists and a larger, ever increasing mass of workers. Somewhere in between was a middle class, composed of the residue of the pre-industrial age and the newly self-employed. Marxists expected to see this middle class become 'proletarianised' and eventually disappear from the social landscape. A more polarised class structure would emerge in which the working class would become more and more homogeneous, therein providing the basis for a socialist political program.<sup>29</sup>

But the 20th century has seen otherwise. As predicted, more and more areas of production have been brought within the orbit of capitalism and this has seen traditional groups like peasants, small farmers, artisans and shopkeepers move into the ranks of the working class.<sup>30</sup> However, the working class itself has *not* become homogenised. Rather it has become more diverse, more divided into 'fractions' than ever before.

So where do the middle class activists who populate this book fit into this new scheme of things? Both Australian and overseas research has shown that the majority of environmental activists are white, highly educated and middle class.<sup>31</sup> Whilst much of this research uses the term middle class in its mainstream sociological definition, the possibility of linking these findings with the Marxist definition of class is contained in the fact that occupation is common to both definitions. However, for Marxists, 'occupation' is really a short hand phrase for the more important issues of labour process, labour markets and class power.

According to labour process theorists like Richard Edwards,<sup>32</sup> the labour market under capitalism is fundamentally segmented into primary and secondary labour markets and this produces many of the inequalities of contemporary capitalism, particularly those

based on gender and race. In Edwards' analysis, the primary labour market is further sub-divided into an independent sector and a subordinate sector. These various divisions are very important for understanding the working class–middle class split. Edwards argues that middle-class workers sell their labour in the independent primary labour market and, in so doing, mostly enter bureaucracies where they exercise supervisory and managerial functions. As a reward for their compliance with the requirements of management (things like dedication to their work and 'building a career') these workers enjoy considerable autonomy and privileges in their work and are very well paid. By contrast, most members of the working class enter the secondary labour market where the jobs are poorly paid, not well unionised and subject to very poor working conditions. The more skilled sections of the manual working class enter the subordinate primary labour market, an area of traditional unionised factory and lower-level office work. The jobs they find here are better paid and more secure than those in the secondary labour market. In the case of the timber industry, the more skilled workers entered their jobs through this subordinate primary labour market whereas the unskilled manual labourers moved through the secondary labour market.

The rainforest conservationists overwhelmingly sold their labour in the independent primary labour market. Most of the prominent activists on the north coast were either salaried professionals, self-employed professionals, students, unemployed people, retired workers or housewives. With the exception of housewives,<sup>33</sup> these people either directly sold their labour in this labour market, had done so previously (unemployed or retired) or were on the way to entering it (students). Even the self-employed professionals were linked to this labour market since many of their peers practised essentially the same profession on a salaried basis.

Irrespective of their family origins, middle-class workers gained access to the primary independent labour market by virtue of their tertiary education. As we saw in several of the earlier chapters, this formal education was a major element in the cultural antagonism between timber workers and conservationists. It was also the basis for the profound differences in power exercised by each group, whether in the workplace or in political struggle.

Some theorists, like Alvin Gouldner, see tertiary education as a form of 'cultural capital' whereby the middle class secures social privileges and political power at the expense of the old moneyed-capitalist class.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, theorists Barbara and John Ehrenreich, argue that the growth of the 'professional-managerial class' has taken place at the expense of the working class. This new middle class exists 'as a mass grouping in monopoly capitalist society, only by virtue of the expropriation of the skills and culture once indigenous to the working class'.<sup>35</sup> The Ehrenreichs' theory clearly goes some way towards explaining the animosity that surrounds the 'displacement' process discussed earlier. Both Gouldner and the Ehrenreichs see the middle class as a new class, different from both the traditional middle class and the contemporary working class. This view has also been supported by the Greek Marxist, Nicos Poulantzas, who argues that the 'new middle class' is separate from the traditional working class because they engage in mental labour and because that labour is unproductive (in the sense that its products did not enter the market).<sup>36</sup> However, the characteristics which Poulantzas uses to link the diverse group of workers whom he labels the 'new middle class' are essentially a random assortment of descriptive labels. Poulantzas's method of 'arbitrary ascription'<sup>37</sup> has been strongly criticised for failing to offer any real advance over the pigeon-holing approach in traditional sociology.

By contrast, other Marxists have been far more rigorous in their attempts to define this 'new group' of workers. Erik

Olin Wright, for example, has developed a sophisticated approach which incorporates traditional elements of class analysis within a contemporary sociological investigation on an international scale.<sup>38</sup> Theoretically, Wright initially argued that this 'new group' of workers occupy a 'contradictory class location' in which their degree of autonomy in the labour process and the relations of authority they have over others are the salient bench marks for distinguishing them from traditional workers.<sup>39</sup> In a later work, Wright modifies this position to focus on the 'assets' within the labour process which different groups of workers control. The 'new group' of workers are distinguished by their possession of organisational assets or skills assets or a combination of both.<sup>40</sup>

Like Wright, Richard Edwards focuses on the importance of the labour process in explaining this 'new group' of workers.<sup>41</sup> However, he does not see them as either a new class or an 'in-between' class, but simply a fraction of the working class which enjoys a privileged position within the labour process. This happens because their intellectual skills, their specialised knowledge, and their supervisory functions within production give them considerable personal power over others and autonomy for themselves within the work place. To complete this picture, Edwards' analysis of the capitalist labour market (outlined earlier) shows how this institution is the key mechanism for converting power within the labour process into high incomes and social status and a relative insulation from the threat of long-term unemployment.

Despite the persuasiveness of the 'new class' proponents, I have accepted the argument of theorists like Edwards that the new middle class is best understood as a fraction of the working class. While the new class theorists offer useful descriptive accounts of issues like professionalism and class displacement, their analytical usefulness is more limited. By contrast, Edwards' analysis is able to locate the new middle class within a conceptual framework

that is both historically and theoretically rigorous. He is able to relate their characteristics—their skills, their privileges, their distinctive attitudes—to specific developments in the capitalist labour process. As production processes have become more technologically advanced, and as capitalist firms have become more highly monopolised, key groups of highly skilled workers have increased dramatically in number and importance. These workers, who form the core of the new middle class, have remained a fraction of the working class because their essential economic role has not changed. Despite their privileges and their ‘intellectual assets’, the new middle class remains waged and salaried workers who must sell their labour to survive. And, within the production process, it is the highly skilled *labour* of these workers, not their ‘cultural capital’ nor their other assets, which has become indispensable to the efficient functioning of advanced capitalist societies.

I have dwelt on this issue of the labour process, labour markets and class power for three main reasons. First, it is necessary to emphasise that there is a fundamental difference between timber workers and conservationists in terms of social class. The myth of Australia as an egalitarian society is easily overturned by outlining the incidence of poverty<sup>42</sup> but the myth of the classless society tends to be more enduring. As one conservationist declared when the issue of class arose: ‘I’m not either middle class or working class. I’m an Australian who cares about the environment’.<sup>43</sup>

Secondly, without an acknowledgement of this class dimension to environmental politics, many of the more obvious elements of conflict cannot be fully understood. For example, the clash of masculinities exemplified in the timber worker–‘hippie’ conflict is intimately related to how masculinity is constructed along class lines. Similarly, the clash between the city and the country has a class dimension. Australia is the world’s most urbanised country and this trend has intensified in the 1980s. The hopes for decen-

tralisising industry and commerce in the 1960s and early 1970s have evaporated in the late 1980s as the restructuring of the Australian economy leads to even greater concentration of economic activity in the major cities (particularly Sydney and Melbourne). As a result, rural regions find themselves even more vulnerable to recession and structural unemployment<sup>44</sup> while cities burst at the seams as their social infrastructure (housing, transport, sewerage) deteriorates. In this climate, class readily surfaces: it is the rural working class who bear the burden of regional decline and it is the urban middle class who sell their city terraces to become the new settlers in the countryside.

Finally, while it is important to recognise that environmental politics has a class dimension, we must not confuse the conflict between timber workers and conservationists with *class conflict* in the traditional Marxist sense. This book has shown that the conflicts which arise between the manual working class and the middle class are both complex and pervasive. Sharp animosities surface in a range of settings: in the tensions which arise in the workplace, in the shaping of rural and urban space and on the terrain of political campaigning and industrial struggles. Yet despite this pervasiveness, these conflicts are not inherently antagonistic; they are not the product of an exploitative class relationship such as exists between capitalists and workers. The earlier argument that conservationists are a *fraction* of the working class is significant here. Because the 'new middle class' are not a separate social class but a fraction of the working class, it is possible to envisage situations where where the commonality of interests each group shares as members of the working class can outweigh the conflicting demands which arise from their fractional interests. In this sense, the optimism of Castells that a common defence of the social wage can unify these two groups does seem warranted.

In Australia during the 1970s environmental politics developed a radical edge which has been lost in the conservative climate of the 1980s. In both the anti-uranium and Green Bans campaigns, the leading activists located environmental issues within the social, political and economic context of capitalism and the bureaucratic state. As a result, these campaigns produced perceptive and radical social critiques to accompany their environmental demands. The shift to the right, which has been the hallmark of the 1980s, has not spared environmental politics where a preoccupation with wilderness preservation and the mystical side of ecology has swamped any real concern for social justice and human equality. For Castells' optimism to flower, these crucial human values must be reinstated on the agenda of environmental politics.

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## Appendix: Culture and ideology

Throughout this book I have avoided the term ‘ideology’ and employed words like ‘language’, ‘attitudes’ and ‘perspectives’. This has been a deliberate choice, but one which may seem strange to readers familiar with current theories of ideology. After all, at a time when theories of ‘discourse’ have become the dominant intellectual fashion, a book which seeks to analyse people’s ideas without reference to ideology, subjectivity and discourse may seem oddly antediluvian. However, the choice has been a deliberate one, the full justification of which is beyond the scope of this book. Nevertheless, a brief explanation is warranted.

Political science notions of ideology imply little beyond that conveyed by alternative terms like ‘perspective’. Political scientists seek to analyse *systematic sets* of belief, and the role of ‘ideologues’ (that is, people who promote those beliefs) but these issues are easily explored without the term ideology. The sociology of knowledge uses ‘ideology’ in a much more rigorous manner. There the term stands for a tradition of study which analyses how historical conditions both produce human consciousness and are reflected within it.<sup>1</sup> Marxist notions of ideology, a variant within this tradition, have extended the scope of the concept in a number of important and radical ways. Within Marxism, two broad areas have been explored through the concept of ideology and can be

categorised—in the words of one writer—as the ‘burden of epistemology’ and the ‘burden of sociology’.<sup>2</sup> The former refers to the *critical* dimension of Marxism in which theorists argue that ideologies represent *systematic distortions* of the social world. These may be due to either the location of people in a class structure, the nature of capitalist commodity production, the machinations of a ruling class in control of the media, or a specific combination of these elements.<sup>3</sup>

The more sociological theory of ideology is the precursor of modern theories of discourse and has been largely the legacy of the French Marxist, Louis Althusser and the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan. Within this framework, ideologies are sets of representations (for semioticians, ‘significations’) which constitute human subjectivity—that is, the subject positions people take up within social relations.<sup>4</sup> This theory of ‘subjectivity’ is equivocal about the falsity of ideology but adamant about its fundamental role in constituting the psychological terrain in which social relations are formed and reformed. Whilst such a theory of ideology has the potential to challenge oppressive class, race and gender structures in society by examining the discourses which constitute the subjectivities of both the oppressed and the oppressors, it also has the potential to degenerate into a preoccupation with form and style, at the expense of a focus on content and context.<sup>5</sup>

When it comes to using a theory of ideology for concrete analysis each strand of the theory is bedevilled with problems. The notion of ideology as ‘falsity’ is difficult to defend philosophically at the best of times, but in the area of cultural studies it places the researcher in an invidious position of attempting to speak from an epistemologically privileged standpoint. To my mind, the most epistemologically sound theory of ideology if one based on ‘realist’ philosophy<sup>6</sup> and derives from the theory of commodity fetishism developed by Marx in *Capital*. However, this theory is also the

most historically and culturally bound since most of its proponents simply resurrect Marx's original analysis of the development of capitalism. Until its scheme of 'inner relations' and 'phenomenal forms' can be more fully extended into a wider range of political, social and cultural domains, the possibilities for a general theory of ideology with an epistemological dimension seem limited.

The second strand of the theory of ideology—the theory of subjectivity—is also problematic for concrete analysis. It is well recognised that the major weakness in such theories is explaining how subjects exercise their human agency, and thereby have a role in history. There have been interesting attempts to resolve this dilemma, but none have offered satisfactory accounts of the mechanisms within this process. Goran Therborn, for example, argues that 'subject' is a deliberately ambiguous word: it implies both the notion of being 'subjected' to an ideology and yet also being a 'subject' (actor). Similarly, once constituted (and 'qualified') by ideologies as active agents, subjects retain the capacity to qualify those ideologies, 'in the sense of specifying them and modifying their range of application'.<sup>7</sup>

Whilst Therborn's theory raises the possibility of human agency, it does not show how this might occur and what the mechanisms are whereby subjects do indeed qualify the ideologies responsible for their constitution. By contrast, other Marxist theorists (like Roy Bhaskar) provide more satisfactory accounts of the mechanisms involved within structure/agency relationships, but they do so outside the framework of a theory of subjectivity.<sup>8</sup>

The idea of *cultural production* resolves these problems because it firmly places human agency at the centre of analysis and it does not legislate upon the epistemological status of its products. Within this framework, human agents construct their worlds—material, social and cultural—under conditions that offer both possibilities but also impose constraints. While this construction does not

take place under conditions of their choosing, it does represent an historically developed pattern of *choices*. In this sense, human activities are not simply the expression of pre-existing discourses but have a major constitutive role of their own. As this book has shown, these varied human activities have drawn on many existing traditions (class, rural, gender, intellectual) but they have been shaped as a direct response to the exigencies of lived experience. Certainly, this itself has been largely shaped by economic forces—particularly changes within both the labour process and the labour market—but the scope for human innovation is much broader in the area of culture because so many different strands of human activity intersect in that domain.

The theory of cultural production upon which I draw has its origins in a theory of ideology but has been reshaped to reflect the concerns I have outlined above.<sup>9</sup> As I see it, cultural productions take place in a similar mode to other material productions. This process of production makes use of *raw materials* composed of both pre-existing ideas and currently lived experiences. These are worked upon by a particular framework of questions and intellectual techniques (referred to as a ‘problematic’) which function as the *tools* of production. Finally, this process occurs under specific *social relations of production*: namely, who owns and controls the ‘machinery of ideas’ and who is authorised to ‘speak’.

If we apply this framework to the example of the timber workers, we can see that the folklore of timber communities, their family history, their experiences in the bush and in social interaction with their fellow workers, the arguments of the timber lobby and other ‘rural wisdom’, all combined to provide a wide repertoire of raw materials. The tools applied to these raw materials derived from ‘problematics’ based on the importance of practical knowledge, of material security and of nature as a place in which to work. Finally, the social relations under which this cultural pro-

duction took place were equally complex, encompassing the class divisions between mental and manual labour, the gender relations between 'breadwinner' masculinity and rural femininity (with its contradictory combination of resourcefulness and dependency), and the geographical division between the city and the country.

The same analysis can be applied to the conservationists. Their raw materials were drawn from their personal experiences and intellectual background (both living in and studying the bush) and shaped by tools honed in university halls where a distinctively 'anti-utilitarian' framework developed. At the same time, a set of radical and critical questions became a major part of that intellectual framework, a tendency captured in Gouldner's notion of 'the culture of critical discourse'. Finally, the social relations of this production were almost diametrically opposite that of the timber workers: the conservationists were overwhelmingly located on the mental side of the division of labour, predominantly drawn from the cities, and in gender roles undergoing varying degrees of scrutiny.

Despite my preference for a theory of cultural production to a theory of ideology, my framework is not without its own problems. One of the strengths of Marxist analysis is its insistence on 'specificity', that is, on working out what is *distinctive* about different areas of social life that warrants substantive concepts being developed to analyse them. And this is the major area where theories of culture have come unstuck. The tendency to use 'culture' to mean 'a way of life', and 'experience' to encompass all facets of an individual's social being, can lead to the situation where diverse aspects of social relations and practices are fused into a blurred mass. As Richard Johnson warns:

'way of life' ... tends to become everyone's shopping list of elements of thought, action, organization, work or leisure. 'Cultural studies' tends to inherit and to develop the ex-

treme descriptive heterogeneity of this object. It follows that it is not possible to speak coherently about the relation between culture and other (kinds of?) practices, except to insist that all is part of one totality. A persistent fuzziness must result.<sup>10</sup>

The Marxist analytical division of social life—into economics, politics and ideology—is one useful way to avoid this ‘globalising’ tendency. Michael Burroway, for example, shows how this division can still recognise the inter-connectedness of social life when he argues that the labour process is composed of different ‘instances’.<sup>11</sup> In the labour process workers produce material commodities (economics), whilst at the same time they also transform their social relations (politics). In the course of these activities, they produce experiences of their working lives (ideology). The notion of ideology here—as the transformation of experience by human agents under circumscribed conditions—is similar to the notion of cultural production which I have discussed at length above.

In conclusion, the metaphor of the labour process contains a number of possibilities. It not only suggests a useful way of understanding the process of cultural production but it also suggests how we may retain clear analytical distinctions while continuing to work in the fruitful area of cultural studies.

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## Glossary of timber terms

- Aforestation*: To plant trees on land not previously forested
- Benchman (Number One Benchman)*: The operative in charge of the breaking down saw which converts the logs into flitches
- Brushwood*: Non-eucalypt species indigenous to rainforest 'brushes' or 'scrubs' of Eastern Australia (also called scrubwood)
- Chipper*: Machine for reducing whole logs or solid sawmill residue to wood chips
- Conifer*: A tree belonging to the order Coneferæ of the botanical group Gymnospermæ, bearing cones and needle-shaped or scale-like leaves, usually evergreen and producing timber known as 'softwood'
- Cord wood*: Short wood, usually pulpwood or fuel wood
- Defect*: Any irregularity in timber that lowers its strength, durability or utility
- Docking*: To cross-cut timber to specified lengths, or to free it from defects excessive for the grade specified
- Dressed timber*: Timber finished to a smooth surface on one or more surfaces

- Eucalypts*: Australian trees of genus *eucalyptus* which covers various species including gums, boxes, ironbarks, ashes, stringybarks
- Exotic*: Refers to timber species grown or introduced from abroad as opposed to indigenous (e.g. radiata pine)
- Fitch*: A large piece of sawn log intended for further cutting. A fitch is sawn on two surfaces at least
- Green timber*: Timber which is unseasoned and thus still has 'free water' in its cell cavities
- Hardwood*: Wood from trees classified botanically as Angiosperms. Most hardwood trees are broad leaved, and the wood has pores. Many hardwood trees, particularly the eucalypts, produce timber which is hard but there are some hardwood trees, such as Australian red cedar and Tasmanian myrtle beech, which produce timber which is reasonably soft. The most important hardwood species on the north coast were: blackbutt (*Eucalyptus pilularis*), tallowwood (*Eucalyptus microcorys*), red mahogany (*Eucalyptus resinifera*), flooded gum (*Eucalyptus grandis*), brush box (*Tristania conferta*). Most of the important rainforest species were also technically hardwoods: red cedar (*Toona australis*), coachwood (*Ceratopetalum apetalum*), negrohead beech (*Northofagus moorei*), silky oak (*Grevillia robusta*). North coast hardwood timbers are used for general purpose building and joinery. The construction timbers are generally used in their 'green' state because they are inclined to split if nailed when dry.
- Haulier*: A truck driver who transports the logs to the mill
- Head*: Top branches and leaves of a tree. Also called the crown
- Indigenous species*: Native timbers. (On the north coast of New South Wales mostly hardwoods except for some native softwoods like hoop pine.)

*Log:* A length cut from the stem or large branch of a tree from which timber is to be sawn, hewn or otherwise produced

*Particleboard:* A panel manufactured by the bonding together of wood chips and particles of wood. (Also called chipboard.)

*Pipe:* The hollow centre of a log

*Plantation:* A forest crop raised artificially, either by sowing or planting

*Plywood:* An assembled product made up of two or more veneers banded together with the direction of the grain in alternate plies, usually at right angles

*Pulp-wood:* Forest waste timber used in making paper and wall-boards

*Rainforest:* A closed community dominated by usually tall trees forming a deep, densely interlacing canopy in which lianes and epiphytes (one plant growing on another) are often present, with smaller trees, shrubs, ferns and herbs beneath. Most rainforest timbers are technically hardwoods but timber workers usually refer to them as 'softwoods' because they are softer than eucalypts. The most important rainforest species are red cedar (*Toona australis*), coachwood (*Ceratopetalum apetalum*), negrohead beech (*Northofagus moorei*), silky oak (*Grevillia robusta* and the most important rainforest softwood is hoop pine (*Araucaria cunninghamii*). Rainforest timbers are prized for joinery, cabinet work and for plywood veneers. Coachwood was a particularly valuable timber for coach building and for marine ply.

*Reforestation:* To plant trees for re-establishment of a former forest. (Sometimes mistakenly called 'reafforestation'.)

*Rough sawn:* Undressed timber. Timber in the form in which it comes from the saw

- Saw doctor*: A skilled tradesperson who repairs saw blades and may maintain sawmilling equipment
- Scantling*: Timber of rectangular or square cross-section, and of dimensions used in construction
- Seasoning*: Drying timber to a moisture range appropriate to the conditions and purposes for which it is to be used
- Silviculture*: Growing and tending of trees as a specialised branch of forestry
- Skids*: Wooden or metal runners on benches in sawmills along which logs or flitches are moved
- Snig*: Dragging of felled trees out of the forest by tractor or other means
- Softwood*: Wood from trees classified botanically as Gymnosperms. Commercial timbers of this group are nearly all conifers with leaves which are 'needle-like'. The most important exotic softwoods in the timber industry are oregon (imported from North America) and radiata pine (grown locally in plantations and imported from New Zealand). Important indigenous softwoods are hoop pine (*Araucaria cunninghamii*) and white cypress pine (*Callitris glauca*). Their softness and uniformity make softwoods easier to work with and thus favoured by carpenters. As seasoned timber, radiata pine has come to dominate the building and furniture industries.
- Stumpage*: Amount paid to Forestry Commission for crown logs
- Superfoot*: Superficial foot. A unit of volume for timber equivalent to 1 square foot 1 inch thick. 100 superfet of sawn timber equals 0.236 cubic metres.
- Sustained yield*: Harvesting the forest at such a rate that natural regeneration can replace the trees logged

*Tailer-out:* The operative on the out-feed side of a saw or planing machine who draws out the timber and passes it on to the next process

*Veneer:* A thin sheet of wood produced by slicing or rotary cutting

*Sources:* Timber Secretarial Group of New South Wales *Dictionary of Timber Terms and other information* Sydney, 1973 and D.J. Boland et al. *Forest Trees of Australia* Melbourne: Nelson & CSIRO, 1984

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## Notes

### Introduction: two worlds

- 1 All the quotes in this book which are in this sans serif font are taken from my taped oral history interviews. The names of the persons to whom these quotes are attributed are not their real names.
- 2 Neville Wran's speech to the 1983 A.L.P. State Conference, quoted in Jim Somerville *How the Rainforest Was Saved, the Inside Story of the Ten Year Battle* Sydney: Colong Committee, 1983, epilogue.
- 3 Headline comes from *Parks and Wildlife News* 1, 1, 1983, p. 1
- 4 See appendix one for a discussion of what I mean by 'culture'.
- 5 I return in detail to the issue of what is meant by the terms 'working class' and 'middle class' in chapter 7. As a brief definition, a member of the working class is someone who has no choice but to sell their labour in order to survive. Such people cannot accumulate sufficient capital to employ others. Members of the middle class (which I regard as a *fraction* of the working class) are still obliged to sell their labour in order to live, but their tertiary qualifications (or similar advantages) provide them with a privileged position within the labour market. Middle class workers often earn their livelihood through their profession, whether salaried or self-employed. I do not include business people within the middle class.

### Chapter 1 The timber industry: historical background

- 1 An anonymous reporter writing in 1869. Quoted in Ian Hudson and Paul Henningham *Gift of God—Friend of Man: A Story of the Timber Industry in New South Wales 1788–1986* Sydney: Australian Forest Industries Journal, 1986, p. 61

- 2 *ibid.* p. 60
- 3 *ibid.* p. 62
- 4 A north coast Correspondent writing to the Sydney Morning Herald in 1872. Quoted in *ibid.* p. 60
- 5 Vic Carle describing the early settlers, quoted in Helen Hannah *Forest Giants: Timbergetting in the New South Wales Forests 1800–1950* Sydney: Forestry Commission of New South Wales, 1986, p. 5
- 6 John Golding ‘Forest Operations—Past and Present’ *Forest and Timber* vol. 10, no. 2, 1974, p. 5
- 7 New South Wales Parliament *Report from the Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly upon the Timber Industry* Sydney, 1967 (Printed 1968), p. 4. Hereafter cited as *1967 Timber Inquiry*.
- 8 Sawmiller John Machin, quoted in Hudson and Henningham *Gift of God* p. 128
- 9 Bob Sutherland ‘Change and Progress in the Sawmilling Industry’ *Forest and Timber* vol. 10, no. 10, 1974, p. 9
- 10 *Australian Financial Review* 10 March 1960, p. 10 and 24 October 1961, p. 9. *Australian Timber Journal* vol. 30, no. 1, 1964, pp. 2 & 85; vol. 31, no. 3, 1965, p. 2; vol. 34, no. 12, 1969, p. 69; and vol. 35, no. 10, 1969, pp. 81–5; *Australian Forest Industries Journal* vol. 40, no. 12, 1975, p. 9
- 11 *Australian Timber Journal* vol. 29, no. 6, 1963, p. 2; Department of Secondary Industry *Review of the Australian Plywood and Veneer Industries* Canberra: A.G.P.S., 1972, p. 65; L. Chapman ‘Effect of New Zealand–Australia Free Trade Agreement’ *Australian Timber Journal* vol. 37, no. 5, 1971, pp. 23–25
- 12 This was revealed in the *Report by the Honourable Mr Justice Richards A Member of the Industrial Commission of NSW into Certain Aspects of the Timber Industry* New South Wales Parliamentary Papers (1955), pp. 134–5
- 13 Eric Potter, President of the New England Branch of the Associated Country Sawmillers. *1967 Timber Inquiry* p. 389
- 14 *Hannah Forest Giants* p. 23
- 15 Hudson and Henningham *Gift of God* p. 193
- 16 D. Ruming, New England and North West Timber Group *1967 Timber Inquiry* pp. 391–2. D.A. Wilkinson, the Managing Director of Forest Products Marketing P/L, argued in 1972: ‘the significant and long recognised problem facing the industry seeking to raise finance investment proposals is its lack of security of tenure’. ‘The Future Role of the Small Sawmill’ *Australian Timber Journal* vol. 38, no. 10, 1972, p. 51

- 17 These were rumoured to be worth about \$3 per cubic metre of annual quota during the 1970s. John Dargavel, Jane Goddard and Sonia Caton 'Allocating Forest Resources in New South Wales: Guide to Legislation, Regulation and Administrative Practice' unpublished paper from Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, ANU, 1986
- 18 For example, the large sawmillers, Duncans, invested \$4.4 million in a large integrated softwood plant in Canberra while Allen Taylors poured \$10 million into their softwood processing operations in the Bathurst / Oberon area.
- 19 For example, Carricks and Hancock Brothers (both Queensland based companies), disinvested from the north coast industry during the early 1980s.
- 20 See the glossary of timber terms in appendix two for an explanation of the differences between hardwoods and softwoods.
- 21 Hudson and Henningham *Gift of God* p. 290
- 22 A.H. Walker, the Forestry Commission's Assistant Commissioner, noted: 'There is ample historical evidence that the non-usable timber of one era becomes usable in a later period of time'. 'Forest Resources—New South Wales' *Australian Timber Journal* vol. 36, no. 3, 1970, p. 27
- 23 Hudson and Henningham *Gift of God* pp. 119, 319
- 24 P.J. Wilkinson 'Planning for the Rationalisation, Amalgamation and Changing Pattern of Eastern Australian Hardwood Sawmilling' *Australian Timber Journal* vol. 35, no. 11, 1969, p. 248 and 'One Company's Positive Approach to Research, Processing and Product Marketing' *Australian Forest Industries Journal* vol. 38, no. 9, 1972, pp. 29–41
- 25 Eric Fenning, sawmiller, quoted in Hannah *Forest Giants* p. 20
- 26 In their overview of the national scene, John Dargavel and Annie Boutland noted with regard to pine that: 'The uniformity of the wood, its accurate sizing, careful grading, clean presentation and ease of use were powerful advantages for it in the market. By the 1980s it had captured 40 per cent of the sawn timber and its share is forecast to rise to 60 or 70 per cent in future'. 'Timber firms in the 20 th century' in John Dargavel (ed) *Sawing, Selling & Sons: Histories of Australian Timber Firms* Canberra: Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, 1988, p. 73
- 27 J. Machin, sawmiller from Wingham 1967 *Timber Inquiry* p. 340
- 28 Jack Beale, Minister for Conservation, in a speech to the Australian Timber Stabilisation Conference in 1968 stressed that the timber industry nationally provided 40,000 jobs and supported 100,000 people. *Forest and Timber* vol. 6, no. 2, 1968, p. 7
- 29 'Economic Study Group Report', Part 5, reprinted in *Australian Timber Journal* vol. 37, no. 2, 1971, p. 37

- 30 R. and V. Routley *The Fight for the Forests: the takeover of Australian forests for pines, woodchips, and intensive forestry* (Third Edition), Canberra: Research School of Social Sciences, ANU, 1975
- 31 Quoted in L.T. Carron *A History of Forestry in Australia* Canberra: ANU Press, 1985, p. 5
- 32 *Forest and Timber* vol. 4, no. 1, 1967, p. 1. So concerned were they with the social consequences of this trend that the 1967 Timber Inquiry recommended that New South Wales seek Federal funding in an effort to increase the treatment of native forests. *Australian Timber Journal* vol. 34, no. 1, 1968, pp. 86–7
- 33 New South Wales Forestry Commission *Indigenous Forest Policy* Sydney, 1976, p. 35
- 34 R.J. Reichel 'Log Pricing in NSW' *Forest and Timber* vol. 17, no. 2, 1981, p. 7
- 35 Quoted in Hannah *Forest Giants* p. 22
- 36 W.J. Royce 'The Effect on Decentralisation of Government Policies Towards the Timber Industry' *Australian Timber Journal* vol. 34, no. 10, 1968, p. 57
- 37 *ibid.* pp. 58 and 60
- 38 "'Timber Industry Vital Element" says NSW Premier' *Australian Timber Journal*, vol. 32, no. 10, 1966, p. 83
- 39 As John Machin, sawmiller from Wingham, argued: 'The most efficient sawmilling appears to happen in small to medium size mills where there is management-ownership.' *1967 Timber Inquiry* p. 339
- 40 J. Andrews, Hastings Shire President *1967 Timber Inquiry* pp. 317–8
- 41 Editorial in the *Australian Timber Journal* vol. 36, no. 1, 1970, p. 2
- 42 *1967 Timber Inquiry* p. 275
- 43 R. Ritchie, chief of economics and marketing, Forestry Commission, *1967 Timber Inquiry* p. 40
- 44 *ibid.* p. 78
- 45 *ibid.* pp. 78–9
- 46 L. Chapman, Managing Director of Allen Taylors *1967 Timber Inquiry* p. 244
- 47 Bob Jessop *The Capitalist State: Marxist Theories and Methods* Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1982, p. 230
- 48 *ibid.*
- 49 *Australian Timber Journal* vol. 30, no. 9, 1964, p. 2
- 50 As one sawmiller commented: 'It's the big companies that are in sawmilling today. They can deal with the Commission much better than the small individual. That's

why the small sawmiller eventually got out. It's more efficient to run a big mill.'  
Quoted in Hannah *Forest Giants* p. 24

## Chapter 2 Working in the timber industry

- 1 See Geoffrey Lawrence *Capitalism and the Countryside: The Rural Crisis in Australia* Leichhardt: Pluto Press, 1987. The quote in the chapter heading comes from Dick Monck, retired sawmill worker, quoted in Hannah *Forest Giants* p. 83
- 2 The understanding of the labour process which informs this chapter has been based largely on the writings of Harry Braverman, Michael Burroway and Richard Edwards. Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital, the Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974) has been the seminal work in this field. Burroway's works include: *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process under Monopoly Capitalism* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979 and *The Politics of Production* London: Verso, 1985. Edwards' *Contested Terrain, The Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1979) has been particularly influential, as will be evident in chapter 7.
- 3 Commission of Inquiry into Poverty *Rural Poverty in Northern New South Wales* Canberra: A.G.P.S., 1974, p. 35
- 4 J. Machin, sawmiller from Wingham 1967 *Timber Inquiry* p. 340
- 5 Australian Bureau of Statistics, New South Wales office *Employment in Sawmills and Forestry* 1966 and 1976
- 6 One of the tactics of the strikers, which was later to gain notoriety for the Terania Creek protesters, was to drive steel spikes into the logs awaiting milling at the large timber merchants. This was intended to make it difficult for scabs to mill the logs. Hudson and Henningham *Gift of God* p. 177
- 7 See Miriam Dixson 'The Timber Strike of 1929' *Historical Studies—Australia and New Zealand* University of Melbourne vol. 10, no. 40, 1963, pp. 479–492; and A. Todd 'The 1929 Timber Workers Strike' *The NSW Timber Worker* vol. 11, no. 2, 1971, p. 23. See also *The NSW Timber Worker* vol. 7, no. 25, 1962, pp. 3 and vol. 7, no. 28, 1963, p. 3
- 8 In the eyes of the timber industry employers, Joe Weir was 'largely responsible for the harmonious industrial relations that have characterised the industry in recent years'. (Hudson and Henningham *Gift of God* p. 181). And Barrie Unsworth, the conservative assistant secretary of the NSW Labor Council during the 1970s, wrote approvingly of Joe Weir's approach to industrial relations. (*Australian Forest Industries Journal* vol. 44, no. 11, 1978, p. 62)
- 9 Statistics for the period 1968 to 1982 in New South Wales show convincingly that the timber industry consistently had the lowest level of industrial disputes (i.e.

stoppages involving a total of ten ‘mandays’ or more) of any industry in the state. ‘Labour Wages and Prices’ in *New South Wales Official Year Books* 61, 62, 63, 65, 69 (1971–85)

- 10 *The NSW Timber Worker* vol. 6, no. 2, 1953, pp. 1 and vol. 6, no. 9, 1956, p. 3
- 11 For example, ‘The Story of a Non-Unionist’ *The NSW Timber Worker* vol. 6, no. 9, 1956, p. 2 and ‘A Million Reasons’ *The NSW Timber Worker* vol. 7, no. 26, 1963, p. 2
- 12 *NSW Statistical Register* ‘Factories’ 1945 to 1967, Table 13; Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Employment in Sawmills and Forestry* 1966 to 1985
- 13 *The NSW Timber Worker* vol. 17, no. 3, 1972, p. 1; vol. 18, no. 3, 1974, p. 1; vol. 16, no. 3, 1971, p. 1; vol. 18, no. 1, 1973, p. 1
- 14 *The NSW Timber Worker* vol. 7, no. 9, 1960, p. 4; vol. 7, no. 31, 1964, p. 2; vol. 6, no. 12, 1957, p. 2;
- 15 *The NSW Timber Worker* vol. 7, no. 19, 1960, p. 4; vol. 8, no. 1, 1968, p. 2; *Australian Timber Journal* vol. 33, no. 3, 1967, p. 81
- 16 ANU Archives of Business and Labour, Z138, Box 139, (Arbitration Act, Suggested Amendments), Weir to Gardiner, 1/11/1950
- 17 Timber Workers’ Union award, paragraph 36, sections b and e. Quoted in *The NSW Timber Worker* vol. 6, no. 17, 1959, p. 3
- 18 Meredith Burgmann ‘Social Movements, Trade Unions and Labor Governments’, *Broad Left Conference* 29 March 1986

### Chapter 3 Working-class culture

- 1 Antonio Gramsci *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* New York: International Publishers, 1971, p. 321
- 2 The dominant mode of masculinity in Australian society—with its characteristics of ‘breadwinning’, physical toughness, fighting prowess, sports-mania, risk taking and capacity for ‘hard work’—is a distinctively manual working-class form. While this kind of masculinity can be regarded as ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (in the words of R. W. Connell), it is actually tied to a group of workers now in numerical decline (as chapter 7 will show). See R. W. Connell ‘Men’s Bodies’ in *Which Way is Up? Essays on Class, Sex and Culture* Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1983
- 3 Andrew Tolson *The Limits of Masculinity* London: Tavistock, 1977, p. 48
- 4 Paul Willis ‘Shop floor culture, masculinity and the wage form’ in J. Clarke, C. Critcher, R. Johnson *Working Class Culture, Studies in history and theory*, London: Hutchinson, 1979, pp. 194–5
- 5 *Australian Timber Journal* vol. 34, no. 1, 1968, p. 90

- 6 J.L. Larkin 'Safety in the Sawmilling Industry' *Australian Timber Journal* vol. 32, no. 7, 1966, p. 85
- 7 *ibid.* p. 91 and *Australian Forest Industries Journal* vol. 48, no. 12 and vol. 49, no. 1, 1983, p. 49
- 8 A recent study of coronial inquests showed that timber getting on the north coast ranked with farming as the most hazardous occupation. Timber workers were twice as likely to be killed on the job as workers in the building and construction industry. Report by Joanne Findlay *Country Wide ABC Television*, 29 September 1989
- 9 *Australian Forest Industries Journal* vol. 49, no. 1, 1983, p. 49
- 10 *ibid.* Though making up only one third of timber workers, log fallers suffered two thirds of the accidents in the industry. *ibid.*
- 11 A CSIRO study compared the safety habits of hardwood sawlog fallers with pulp wood fallers and found the former to have much lower safety standards. These workers were small independent log fallers and, like those in the north coast hardwood industry, they had acquired their skills through the traditional handing down of knowledge. The safer log fallers, on the other hand, were those workers employed and trained by the large corporations in their plantations. M.P. Crowe 'Felling techniques in Australian hardwood forests' in *Australian Forestry* vol. 48, no. 2, 1985, p. 90. In an earlier article Crowe had noted: 'Most fallers today pick up their knowledge and learn their skills haphazardly and depend largely on their own experience. It can be a hard and costly way to learn.' (M.P. Crowe 'Faller Survey' *Prologue* (Journal of the Associated Country Sawmillers), April-June 1983, p. 3) The coronial inquest study mentioned above also found that 95 per cent of timber workers learned their skills on the job (*Country Wide*).
- 12 *Tall Timbers*, directed by Ken Hall, screenplay by Frank Harvey, based on an original story by Frank Hurley. Released in 1937. (National Library of Australia Film Collection)
- 13 Helen Hannah observed: 'For many years it was possible to become a forester by promotion from labouring job to foreman and then forester. Examinations had to be passed. However, more recently, it became necessary to have a degree in forestry and this brought into the Commission many men who were very different in ideas and attitudes to the "bushmen" who had begun in forestry in the postwar years and worked their way to becoming a forester.' *Forest Giants* p. 100
- 14 These are summarised from Jennifer J. Powys *Aspects of Land Use and Part-Time Farming in Northern New South Wales* Sociology Research Monograph no. 3, Armidale: University of New England, 1981. Bill Metcalf has argued strongly against the proposition that one can 'discuss alternative lifestyle groups as if they are a homogeneous collection of people and ideas' and proposes a sophisticated classification system to encompass this diversity. William J. Metcalf 'A Classification of

Alternative Lifestyle Groups' *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* vol. 20, no. 1, 1984, pp. 66–80

- 15 Powys found that 58 per cent of landsharers gave social security as their source of income. (1981, p. 59.) Sommerlad et. al. found that 46.2 per cent of the aggregate cash income of rural land sharers was from social security payments. (E.A. Sommerlad, P.L. Dawson, J.C. Altman *Rural Landsharing Communities: An Alternative Economic Model?* Bureau of Labour Market Research, Monograph Series No. 7, Canberra: AGPS, 1985, p. 115)
- 16 Powys found that 75 per cent or more had achieved an education higher than secondary level while Sommerlad et. al. put the figure at 64.6 per cent. (Powys *Aspects of Land Use* p. 10 and Sommerlad et. al. *Rural Landsharing Communities* p. 99)
- 17 Powys found evidence which confirmed this impression. She referred to the 'Lack of knowledge in survival life styles' which showed up as low levels of food production and poor siting of houses and gardens. *Aspects of Landuse* pp. 24–5
- 18 Tolson *The Limits of Masculinity* pp. 78–9
- 19 Interviewed in the film, *Give Trees A Chance*, produced and directed by Jeni Kendall from Nimbin. (National Library of Australia Film Collection)
- 20 Andrew Tolson (*The Limits of Masculinity*, p. 81) argues that: 'the middle-class professional does not do a "job", he pursues a "career"; he is paid not a "wage", but a "salary"; he works not by the "clock", but by "appointment". His career is a long-term investment, a ladder of individual achievement, finally rewarded by the "golden handshake".' And Paul Willis argues: "'the lads" [working-class non-conformists] are not choosing careers or particular jobs, they are committing themselves to a future of generalised labour.' (Paul Willis *Learning to Labour, How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* Westmead: Gower, 1980, pp. 99–100)
- 21 Richard Sennett and Johnathon Cobb *The Hidden Injuries of Class* New York: Vintage Books, 1973, pp. 78–9. Similar sentiments arise in Australia. In the work carried out by Connell et. al. in their research for *Making the Difference*, the researchers spoke with working-class parents and found that many whose formal education had been cut short in the 1950s had never relinquished their aspirations to gain further knowledge. See: R.W. Connell, D.J. Ashenden, S. Kessler, G.W. Dowsett *Making the Difference: Schools, Families and Social Division* Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1982, ch.2; and also Ashenden, et. al., 'Class and Secondary Schooling—Some proposals for an approach stressing situations and practices' in *School, Home and Work Project Report* No. 3, (June 1980). In one of my interviews with a log faller and his wife, the discussion focused for a while on the difficult financial situation they were in with their repayments on the log faller's capital equipment. At one point, she quietly noted: We seem to have a lot [of hassles]. I don't know

whether it's our own fault through not being, um, you know, a bit, if we had been a bit more highly educated or something, I don't know whether it would have helped us out with a few of our problems.

- 22 Sennett and Cobb *The Hidden Injuries of Class* pp. 137–8. In the Australian context, Keith Windschuttle noted a similar phenomenon: *Unemployment: A Social and Political Analysis of the Economic Crisis in Australia* Ringwood: Penguin, 1979, pp. 168–9

## Chapter 4 Timber workers, nature and history

- 1 Raymond Williams 'Ideas of Nature' in Johnathon Bentall (ed) *Ecology in Theory and Practice* New York: Viking Press, 1972, p. 146
- 2 Steven Cotgrove 'Environmentalism and Utopia' in *Sociological Review* 24, 1976, p. 33
- 3 Forester Kevin Freeman, quoted in Hannah *Forest Giants* p. 89
- 4 Story from sawmiller John Machin of Wingham, quoted in Hudson and Henningham *Gift of God* p. 282
- 5 The ACS spent \$200,000 on its 'Let the Light Shine Through' campaign which was directed at city people through newspapers and television. Its major theme was that forests regenerated after logging and that conservationists had misled the public about forestry management. (Hence the double meaning to their title.)
- 6 To the new settlers their lifestyles were far from unproductive. They saw themselves as contributing to the community by developing ecologically sustainable forms of agriculture, establishing new kinds of spiritual and social relations, and fostering an artistic and intellectual renaissance in the region. In the words of one new settler, their presence had turned Lismore into 'an Athens of the north'.
- 7 Popular Memory Group 'Popular Memory: theory, politics, method' in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies *Making Histories—Studies in history-writing and politics* London: Hutchinson, 1982, p. 207
- 8 *ibid.*
- 9 When the north coast timber workers talked of 'softwoods' they meant rainforest timbers, the majority of which were technically 'hardwoods'. When they referred to the exotic softwood plantations, they would use the word 'pines' (because most of these plantations were radiata pine). They used the word 'softwood' in this particular way because the rainforest timbers, such as cedar and coachwood, were considerably softer than the eucalypts which they also logged. For the precise differences between these timbers see the glossary.
- 10 L.P. Hartley *The Go-Between* London: Hamish Hamilton, 1972, p. 9

- 11 Jack Henry, former Forestry Commissioner, quoted in Hudson and Henningham *Gift of God* p. 42
- 12 *ibid.* p. 206
- 13 Frank Kraegen's recollections of joining the staff of the ACS in the 1940s. Quoted in Hudson and Henningham *Gift of God* p. 203
- 14 See chapter 1.
- 15 As early as 1973 the Forestry Act was amended to include the need to conserve birds and animals within State Forests and Flora Reserves.
- 16 See, for example, the series of debates about the effect of logging on the flood level of the Richmond river in the pages of the Lismore press. *Northern Star* 20 March 1976, 11 May 1976, 14 May 1976, 24 April 1976
- 17 See, for example, Lismore *Northern Star* 8 March 1976, 24 August 1976, 18 March 1978; Murwillumbah *Daily News* 27 December 1977, 29 December 1977; Kyogle *Express* 21 January 1982
- 18 See, for example, Lismore *Northern Star* 21 March 1973, 24 May 1973, 12 December 1977; Murwillumbah *Daily News* 25 May 1973, 9 November 1976; Grafton *Daily Examiner* 11 August 1980, 13 August 1980, 28 August 1980, 16 January 1981, 4 February 1981, 13 March 1981, 22 August 1981, 19 March 1982
- 19 Don Aitkin 'The Australian Country Party' in H. Mayer and H. Nelson (eds) *Australian Politics* Melbourne, Cheshire, 1973, p. 415
- 20 *ibid.* p. 416
- 21 *ibid.* p. 416

## Chapter 5 The rainforest conservationists

- 1 *Give Trees a Chance.*
- 2 *ibid.*
- 3 In fact, the area due for logging in the Terania Creek basin was not the rainforest area at all. It was the hardwood forests in the basin that the Standard Sawmilling Company was attempting to log when the blockade occurred.
- 4 In an attempt to defuse the Terania Creek blockade, the Premier, Neville Wran, set up a State Pollution Control Commission inquiry, headed by a retired judge, Simon Isaacs. The Terania Creek Inquiry, which lasted over a year, eventually recommended in favour of logging. The conservationists also began to take legal action against the Forestry Commission in the Land and Environment Court in attempts to slow down forestry operations pending the final government policy

decision on rainforest logging. See Peter Prineas 'Forests and the Law' *National Parks Journal* vol. 26, no. 6, 1982–83

- 5 The occupations of the main local conservationists in the Border Ranges, Terania Creek, Washpool and Hastings campaigns were: school teachers (6), ranger/naturalists (4), home duties (4), horticulturalists (3), television/advertising (3), retired manager/administrators (3), engineers (2), architects (2), doctors (2), social welfare workers (2) and one each of the following: college lecturer, lawyer, nurse, journalist, retired policeman, fashion promoter, retired secretary, electrician, retired builder's labourer, bus proprietor.

It is not possible to give a similarly detailed picture of the Sydney conservationists. However, the executive of the Colong Committee (the main conservationist organisation behind the Border Ranges campaign) was composed of two accountants, an economist, an engineer and a scientist. The director of the Total Environment Centre in Sydney was an architect and the executive secretary of the National Parks Association was a lawyer.

- 6 *Save Colong Bulletin* 60, 1980, p. 2
- 7 'Rainforest Emergency: Banda-Banda and Forbes River' Leaflet, supplement to *National Parks Journal* vol. 25, no. 3, 1981
- 8 This was one of the major themes in the Routley's book, *The Fight for the Forests* and it remained a persistent theme in all the anti-forestry campaigns of the late 1960s and 1970s. As a result of these conservationist pressures the Forestry Commission modified some of its forestry practices in 1972 but the 1972 Amendment to the Forestry Act re-affirmed the priority of timber production. Even the promotion of a 'multiple use policy' from 1972 onward was seen by conservationists as a token gesture since, in reality, timber production still determined management policies. See Prineas 'Forests and the Law' p. 24; and Robyn Wise 'Environmental decision-making: a conflict approach to forestry in New South Wales' BA Honours Thesis, School of Geography, University of New South Wales, 1980, p. 26
- 9 The philosophy of 'wise use' conservation was adopted from North America during the 1930s. It was based on the concept of 'rational planning for the efficient development and use of forests' in which forestry science and technology played an important role. (Hannah *Forest Giants* p. 6) Kevin Frawley has noted how: 'This philosophy with its narrow utilitarian base, its technical and economic focus, and eventual assumption that "forests could not survive without the forester" provided the basis of Australian forestry that was to continue unchallenged until the 1960s'. (Quoted in *ibid.*)
- 10 *National Parks Journal* vol. 19, no. 3, 1975, p. 17. This article had earlier defined wilderness as an area 'in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape ... [in which] the earth and its community of life are untrammelled

by man ... ' (p. 16). Isolation also features as one of the main attractions for bushwalking and is one of the reasons why bushwalkers have provided such a large proportion of the conservationists fighting for wilderness preservation.

- 11 Jim Sommerville's *How the Rainforest Was Saved: The Inside Story of the Ten Year Battle* offered a chronological overview of the campaign and dealt at length on the details of each campaign and the personalities involved. Nan Nicholson's article, 'Terania Creek' was originally written for inclusion in a book on forestry in Australia which was never published. She explored the motives of the protesters and assessed the significance of the direct action tactics. Milo Dunphy, one of the main Sydney rainforest conservationists, wrote an article called 'The Significance of Terania Creek' (*Habitat* vol. 7, no. 6, 1979, pp. 11–12) in which he drew a number of parallels between Terania Creek and the Eureka Stockade.
- 12 Peter Prineas and Tony Haigh 'A Park to Serve All Time' *National Parks Journal* vol. 24, no. 2, 1980, p. 20
- 13 The conservationists gave prominence to the following quote in one of the historical articles: ' "There shall be, within the National Forest, what is, to all intents and purposes, a National Park, serving all time." Hon Roy Vincent, Minister for Mines and Forests, May 15, 1937.' Prineas and Haigh 'A Park to Serve All Time' p. 20
- 14 Prineas and Haigh 'A Park to Serve all Time' p. 20; John Seed 'Nightcap: Lismore's "Rip Van Winkle" National Park' *Habitat* Vol 10, no. 6, 1982, pp. 25–6; *Save Colong Bulletin* 75, 1982, p. 5
- 15 As the quote in note 13 illustrates.
- 16 In particular, Joseph Glascott of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and Brian White of Radio 2SM were very supportive of the conservationist case. From the mid-1970s onwards, Glascott gave extensive coverage to rainforest issues and in 1980 White made a one hour documentary on rainforests and then persuaded the station executives to follow this up with a week-long editorial campaign to stop further logging.
- 17 A McNair Anderson survey sponsored by the National Trust and the Australian Conservation Foundation found that 74 per cent of Sydney people wanted remaining rainforests protected from logging and clearing (reported in Jeff Angel 'Rainforests—the Final Act' *National Parks Journal* 26, 1, 1982). Opinion poll results became a contentious issue during the campaign with the sawmillers (through the Associated Country Sawmillers) commissioning a poll which showed a very different result. Both groups worded their questionnaires differently. The conservationists complained that the ACS survey used leading questions because it gave, as background, the Terania Creek Inquiry's recommendation that logging should proceed. However, the conservationists' survey was equally flawed since it asked respondents to answer a single question on whether they approved of logging and

- clearing of rainforests (two different issues). See T.W. Beed 'Why Rainforest Polls are Poles Apart' *National Parks Journal* vol. 26, no. 2, 1982, pp. 13–14
- 18 Walker 'Forest Resources ...' p. 24
- 19 Hudson and Henningham *Gift of God* p. 81
- 20 And this was certainly the case for the north coast hardwood industry. See chapter 1.
- 21 See, for example, Makoto Itoh *Value and Crisis* London: Pluto Press, 1980, ch. 5 and Ben Fine and Laurence Harris *Rereading Capital* London: Macmillan, 1979, ch. 5
- 22 Timber mill employment figures for NSW show a significant decline from 1981 to 1983 (over 20 per cent) and this was most severe for the north coast timber towns e.g. 30 per cent for Wauchope. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, New South Wales Office *Employment in Sawmills and Forestry* 1981 to 1983). However, it is difficult to be precise about what proportion of jobs were lost through industry restructuring and what proportion were lost because of the rainforest campaign because of the complexity of resource availability and the general investment climate. In addition, the final Cabinet rainforest decision occurred during a severe recession in the industry and this makes it even more difficult to separate out those job losses due to marketing problems and those due to resource problems. At least two rainforest mills (at Yarras and Grevillia) were forced to close because of resource problems and this involved the loss of over 200 jobs. See, for example, 'Today a timber village, tomorrow a paddock' *Sydney Morning Herald* 27 August 1982, p. 1
- 23 Alvin W. Gouldner *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* London: Macmillan, 1979, p. 59

## Chapter 6 Economy and ecology

- 1 Frank Littleford (Hastings campaign)
- 2 Bill Florey, a psychologist living near Port Macquarie, who was also involved in the Hastings campaign.
- 3 The mills most affected by the rainforest controversy were at Yarras near Wauchope, at Grevillia near Kyogle, Pidcocks at Grafton and Standards at Murwillumbah.
- 4 According to Forestry Commission assessments, there were 160,900 cubic metres of rainforest timbers in the Washpool and 562,839 cubic metres of hardwoods. The NSW government's 1982 rainforest decision allowed the timber industry to retain three key areas where the bulk of the hardwoods were located. However, this still meant that there were 124,899 cubic metres of rainforest in the forest areas excised and 343,389 cubic metres of hardwoods in the same forest areas, a ratio of nearly three to one. Figures derived from Table 13 New South Wales Forestry Commission *Washpool Environmental Impact Statement* Sydney, 1982, p. 108

- 5 When the Wran Labor Government came to power in 1976 it held office with a one seat majority. Don Day, Labor member for Casino, was an outspoken defender of the timber industry. Day's rural seat remained marginal throughout the Wran years and he played a significant role in frustrating the conservationist case within Cabinet. See Sommerville *How the Rainforest Was Saved*.
- 6 'No Volvos at the bottoms of the greenies' gardens' *Sydney Morning Herald* 21 October 1982. Both in the internal debates within the Labor Party and the NSW Labour Council this dichotomy was regularly invoked to explain the rainforest campaign.
- 7 Hans Magnus Enzensberger 'A Critique of Political Ecology' *New Left Review* 84, 1974, pp. 3, 8-9
- 8 The proponents of deep ecology maintained that natural phenomena had a right to exist independently of human needs. They distinguished this from 'shallow ecology' which merely attempted to 'manage' the environment for a different range of human needs (recreation rather than logging, for example). In the words of Brian Preston: 'An ecocentric approach, or deep ecology approach, is characterised by the wholeness and integrity of humans and nature and by ecological egalitarianism, or the equality of humans with the other members of the earth's ecosystem. Humans are not viewed as being superior, nor are the other members of the ecosystem seen to exist merely for humanity's benefit and enjoyment. Thus an ecocentric approach is diametrically opposed to an anthropocentric approach or one centred on people.' (Brian J. Preston 'Wilderness, An Idea and A Place, Not a Myth' *National Parks Journal* vol. 26, no. 1, 1982, p. 26.) The literature on deep ecology is extensive but concise accounts can be found in William Godfrey-Smith 'Environmental Philosophy' *Habitat* vol. 8, no. 3, 1980, pp. 24-5 and John Seed 'Plumbing Deep Ecology' *Habitat* vol. 10, no. 3, 1982, pp. 27-28 (Seed was one of the main activists at Mt Nardi).
- 9 *Save Colong Bulletin* 68, 1981, p. 1
- 10 Gouldner *Rise of the New Class* p. 19
- 11 Sommerville *How the Rainforest Was Saved* pp. 44 & 47
- 12 Jim Sommerville explained the breakdown in the meetings as due to the 'more militant sawmillers' refusing to support some of the concessions made by the Associated Country Sawmillers. *ibid.* p. 32
- 13 Frank Parkin *Middle Class Radicalism—The Social Bases of the British Campaign For Nuclear Disarmament* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1968, p. 180
- 14 Malcolm Waters 'Industrial Militancy and the New Middle Class: Professional Workers in Australia' *The Australian & New Zealand Journal of Sociology* vol. 25, no. 1, May 1989, pp. 19-20

- 15 See the occupational background of the conservationists listed in note 5 of chapter 5.
- 16 *Save Colong Bulletin* 67, 1981, p. 5
- 17 *National Parks Journal* vol. 24, no. 2, 1980, pp. 31–34
- 18 As Robyn Wise found in her interviews with sawmillers, Terania Creek was definitely seen as setting a precedent for what would happen in the long term in the timber industry. Robyn Wise 'Environmental Decision-Making: A Conflict Approach to Forestry in New South Wales' p. 43. One of the major themes of the Associated Country Sawmillers' campaign against the conservationists was that government indecision was crippling their industry and they published advertisements showing red tape blocking access to the forests with a pair of scissors poised ready to cut the tape. The slogan read, 'Now's the time, Mr. Wran'.
- 19 For example the Schaeffer report on the Border Ranges proposed timber relocation, as well as long-term projects such as reforestation, lodge construction and national park employment generation. See *Save Colong Bulletin* 48, 1978, pp. 2–3; and Wise 'Environmental Decision-Making ... ' pp. 35–6. By 1980, the *Save Colong Bulletin* was proposing the following economic package: alternative employment through reforestation, National Parks and Wildlife Service staffing increases, public works, subsidising suitable industries, and tourism. It finally concluded that if jobs were lost, workers should be compensated and retrained under the 1975 Australian Council of Trade Union's policy on retrenchments. *Save Colong Bulletin* 61, 1980, p. 4
- 20 One of the major points of agreement between the conservationists and the Associated Country Sawmillers was that the government should establish eucalypt plantations on cleared rural land.
- 21 Claus Offe 'New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics' *Social Research* vol. 52, no. 4, 1985, p. 830
- 22 Jeff Angel, assistant director of the Total Environment Centre, at the Eden Woodchip Seminar organised by the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies at the ANU during 1986
- 23 Offe, 'New Social Movements ... ' p. 831

## Chapter 7 Common ground?

- 1 See *Rocking the Foundations: A history of the New South Wales Builders Labourers Federation 1940–74* produced and directed by Pat Fiske and the review of the film by Joe Wachter in *Chain Reaction* 44, 1985–86, pp. 45–46
- 2 Jack Munday 'From Red to Green: Citizen-Worker Alliance' in Drew Hutton (ed) *Green Politics in Australia* Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1987, p. 111

- 3 See Mark A. Haskell 'Green Bans: Worker Control and the Urban Environment' *Industrial Relations* vol. 16, no. 2, 1977
- 4 Bob Pringle and Jack Munday, quoted in Richard J. Roddewig *Green Bans: The Birth of Australian Environmental Politics* Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1978, pp. 656
- 5 In 1970 unemployment in the building industry was 1.4 per cent and had only risen to 1.7 per cent by 1973. However, by the end of 1974 it had risen sharply to 3.6 per cent and the following year reached 5.1 per cent. Figures from Haskell 'Worker Control' p. 210. As Haskell concluded: 'the green bans could not have been sustained through a period of high unemployment, even in the absence of the forces arrayed against them'. (ibid.)
- 6 Jack Munday "'Green Bans" for Urban Quality' *Habitat* vol. 2, no. 2, 1974, pp. 14
- 7 See the definition of 'wise use' conservation in note 9 to chapter 5.
- 8 See the definition of deep ecology in note 8 to chapter 6.
- 9 By contrast, in the United States the group Environmentalists for Full Employment made health and safety activism a major part of their environmental campaigns and in this way found common ground with trade unionists. See R. Kazis and L. Grossman *Fear at Work: Job Blackmail, Labor and the Environment* New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1982, p. 237
- 10 For example, demands for a new charter for the Forestry Commission had been steadily building up during the 1970s. As early as 1974, the National Parks Association had written to the Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, seeking the establishment of a Royal Commission on forestry activities. In the early 1970s, the main issues had been the establishment of a hardwood woodchip industry on the south coast and the clearing of native forests on the Boyd Plateau for pine plantations. (See *National Parks Journal* vol. 18, no. 4, 1974, p. 8 and vol. 19, no. 3, 1975, p. 10) The calls for a new charter were increasingly voiced during the late 1970s and early 1980s and were intended to direct the Forestry Commission to 'the task of conserving timber and rehabilitating derelict and eroded lands', rather than "mining" existing forests'. *Save Colong Bulletin* 64, 1981, p. 1
- 11 Quoted on 'Local Government and Environmental Planning' *Background Briefing* ABC Radio, 22 June 1986
- 12 Munday 'From Red to Green' p. 120
- 13 *Habitat* vol. 2, no. 2, 1974 examined the Green Bans and *Habitat* vol. 3, no. 5, 1975 examined the impact of freeways on cities.
- 14 See *Tribune* 22 May 1985, p. 10
- 15 Peter Christoff cites *Environmental Issues and Usage of National Parks*, Australia, Tables 2 & 3, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Cat. 4115.0, (April 1986), for his argument

- that 'urban issues such as pollution are by far the most "popular" of environmental issues—for all age groups nationwide'. Peter Christoff 'A long Drought ahead? The Environment Movement and Strategies for Change in the 80s' *Social Alternatives* vol. 6, no. 4, 1987, p. 27
- 16 Jack Munday, *Green Bans and Beyond* Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1981, p. 147
- 17 Manuel Castells *City, Class and Power* London, Macmillan, 1978, p. 169
- 18 *ibid.* p. 172
- 19 See Lawrence *Capitalism and the Countryside* ch. 5
- 20 Peter Christoff and Margaret Blakers *Jobs in East Gippsland, A Transitional Economic Strategy* Melbourne: Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands, 1986. Earlier, a similar value-added approach had been developed in Tasmania, but under a less favourable political climate. See Keith Tarlo and Jonathon Miller *Forest Industry Strategy for Tasmania* Hobart: Forest Action Network, 1985 and also Tarlo's article 'Opportunities for conservation and labour from the value prospect' in John Dargavel and Gordon Sheldon *Prospects for Australian Hardwood Forests* CRES Monograph 19, Canberra: Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, 1987
- 21 Alana S. Knaster 'Environmental mediation: balancing economic viability with environmental protection' paper delivered at the *Prospects for Australian Plantations Conference*, Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, ANU, September 1989, p. 10
- 22 The increased dialogue between the Australian Conservation Foundation and the National Farmers Federation as well as the Accord between the Tasmanian Labor Government and the Green Independents provide encouraging signs of this.
- 23 This example is drawn from Kazis and Grossman *Fear at Work* pp. 288–9
- 24 Quoted by Jack Munday 'Trade Unions and Ecology' *Getting Together Conference* Sydney, 29 March 1986
- 25 Figure 7.1 refers to those occupations that are unambiguously white-collar (professional, administrative, clerical and service areas) or blue-collar (farmers, miners, craftsmen etc) and excludes those areas where the division is less clear cut (sales, transport, armed services etc). This is, admittedly, only a very rough method of distinguishing between occupations and the terms 'white-collar' and 'blue collar' are purely descriptive, not theoretical. Moreover, I am not suggesting that white-collar occupations are identical with the middle-class workers discussed in this book. For the dangers of trying to use the CCLO system to map class, see Christopher Starrs and Graeme Vaughan 'Class and Occupation: A Comment on Holton and Martin' in *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Sociology* vol. 24, no. 2, 1988, pp. 285–288
- 26 Neil Smith and Peter Williams offer as one of their definitions of gentrification: 'movement of middle class families into urban areas causing property values to

increase and having the secondary effect of driving out poorer families'. They also link gentrification with changes in the class structure, observing that as well as important urban changes, residential gentrification is underlain by 'specific economic, social and political forces that are responsible for a major reshaping of advanced capitalist societies: there is a restructured industrial base, a shift to service employment and a consequent transformation of the working class, and indeed of the class structure in general; and there are shifts in state intervention and political ideology aimed at the privatization of consumption and service provision. Gentrification is a visible spatial component of this social transformation.' Neil Smith and Peter Williams (eds) *Gentrification of the City London*: Allen and Unwin, 1986 p. 1 and p. 3

- 27 Jackson Brown, quoted in *The Canberra Times* 10 February 1986
- 28 Poll conducted by Rod Cameron's ANOP, quoted in the *Sydney Morning Herald* 1 April 1989
- 29 For brief overviews see Perry Anderson *Considerations on Western Marxism* London: Verso, 1979 and Andre Gorz *Farewell to the Working Class* London: Pluto Press, 1982, ch. 1
- 30 See Braverman *Labor and Monopoly Capital* pp. 271ff
- 31 For example, the Australian Conservation Foundation conducted a survey of its members and found that 64 per cent were tertiary educated and only 2 per cent were industrial workers. (Quoted in Jack Munday "The "environment versus jobs" blackmail can and must be changed' *Tribune* 30 November 1983.) Bruce Davis examined the membership of the Tasmanian Conservation Trust for 1977-8 and found that 40 per cent of its membership was drawn from professional and academic occupations and another 25 per cent were skilled workers. (Bruce W. Davis 'Characteristics and influence of the Australian Conservation Movement: an examination of selected conservation controversies' PhD Thesis, University of Tasmania, October 1981, p. 118). In the American context, Robert Mitchell concluded: 'the sample is almost entirely white, relatively well off, and very well educated—findings which replicate those of other studies of environmental group members'. (Robert Cameron Mitchell 'How "Soft", "Deep", or "Left?" Present Constituencies in the Environmental Movement for Certain World Views' *Natural Resources Journal* 20, 1980, p. 346). See also Jean L. Cohen 'Strategy or Identity: New Theoretical Paradigms and Contemporary Social Movements' *Social Research* vol. 52, no. 4, 1985, p. 667. For the British context see S. Cotgrove and A. Duff 'Environmentalism, Class, and Politics' (mimeo) Science Studies Centre, University of Bath, n.d., cited by Offe 'New Social Movements ... ' p. 883
- 32 Edwards *Contested Terrain* pp. 145ff
- 33 A class analysis of housewives is an immensely complex area, well beyond the brief

analysis offered in this chapter. I do not subscribe to the simplistic notion that the class of housewives is somehow derived from that of their male spouses. Rather, I would see them as occupying (often simultaneously) two realms: a domestic mode of production and a reserve army of labour within the capitalist mode of production. With the exception of middle-class professionals, most housewives enter the secondary labour market (often in a part-time or casual capacity) and therefore form part of that fraction of the working class.

- 34 Gouldner *Rise of the New Class* pp. 12 & 21
- 35 Barbara and John Ehrenreich 'The Professional-Managerial Class' in Pat Walker (ed) *Between Labor and Capital* Boston: South End Press, 1979, pp. 5-45 and pp. 313-334
- 36 Nicos Poulantzas 'On Social Classes' *New Left Review* 78, 1973; 'The New Petty Bourgeoisie' in Allen Hunt *Class and Class Structure* London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977; and *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* London: Verso, 1978
- 37 Alan Hunt's phrase, from 'Identification of the Working Class' in *Class and Class Structure* p. 96
- 38 For a discussion on the Australian component of the Comparative Project on Class Structure and Class Consciousness, see J.H. Baxter et. al. 'The Australian Class Structure: Some Preliminary Results from the Australian Class Project' in *The Australian & New Zealand Journal of Sociology* vol. 25, no. 1, May 1989, pp. 100-20
- 39 Erik Olin Wright *Class, Crisis and the State* London: Verso, 1979
- 40 Erik Olin Wright *Classes* London: Verso, 1985
- 41 Edwards *Contested Terrain* pp. 145ff
- 42 For example, the Social Justice Project, in the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University, has shown that inequality has grown dramatically in Australia since the 1960s. In the 1980s the top 10 per cent of Australians owns at least 60 per cent of the wealth and the proportion of people living in poverty is 12.5 per cent. The findings of this Project are outlined in David O'Reilly 'Retreat Australia Fair' *The Bulletin* 25 April 1989, pp. 52-60
- 43 Participant at the *Getting Together Conference* of environmental activists in Sydney, 29 March 1986
- 44 See Lawrence *Capitalism and the Countryside* ch. 2

## Appendix: Culture and ideology

- 1 See, for example, Nicholas Abercrombie *Class, Structure and Knowledge, Problems in the Sociology of Knowledge* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980
- 2 The phrases come from Joe McCarney *The Real World of Ideology* Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980. McCarney is concerned to argue for a strongly classical Marxist theory of ideology (namely, the class struggle at the level of ideas).

- 3 See, for example, the various essays in Part 1 of Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies *On Ideology* London: Hutchinson, 1978; John Mepham 'The Theory of Ideology in Capital' in Mepham & Ruben *Issues in Marxist Philosophy*; David-Hillel Ruben *Marxism and Materialism* (Second Edition) Brighton: Harvester, 1979; Colin Sumner *Reading Ideologies* London: Academic Press, 1979; Jorge Larrain *The Concept of Ideology* London: Hutchinson, 1979
- 4 See the seminal article by Louis Althusser 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* London: New Left Books, 1977 and the article which introduced Lacan's ideas into Marxist analysis: 'The Mirror-phase as formative of the Function of the I' *New Left Review* 51, 1968, pp. 71-77. A useful exposition of this framework, as developed by theorists like Julia Kristeva, can be found in Steve Burniston and Chris Weedon 'Ideology, Subjectivity and the Artistic Text' in *On Ideology*. Further development of Althusser's schema can be found in Ernesto Laclau *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* London: Verso, 1977
- 5 For the importance of content and context see the criticisms levelled at the structuralist tradition within linguistics by V.N. Volosinov *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* New York: Seminar Press, 1973, p. 58
- 6 Realist philosophy is most strongly associated with the British journal *Radical Philosophy*. Amongst its advocates are Bhaskar, Mepham, Benton, Keat and Urry, the two Sayers, Collier and Ruben. (See the writings of Bhaskar, Mepham, Ruben and Collier in the three volumes of John Mepham & D.H. Ruben *Issues in Marxist Philosophy* Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979). Clear philosophical expositions of the realist position can be found in R. Keat & J. Urry *Social Theory as Science* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1975 and in Ted Benton *Philosophical Foundations of the Three Sociologies* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1977. The links between realist philosophy and Marx's methodology are perceptively explored in Andrew Sayer's article 'Abstraction: A Realist Interpretation' in *Radical Philosophy* 28, 1981 and in Derek Sayer's book *Marx's Method, Ideology, Science and Critique in 'Capital'* Second Edition, Sussex: Harvester, 1983.)
- 7 Goran Therborn *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology* London: Verso, 1980, p. 17
- 8 See the reproduction/transformation schema proposed by Roy Bhaskar 'On the Possibility of Social Scientific Knowledge and the Limits of Naturalism' in John Mepham & D-H. Ruben *Issues in Marxist Philosophy* Volume Three, Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979, pp. 120ff
- 9 The original elements of this framework come from Althusser's notion of 'theoretical practice', found in *Reading Capital*, and a useful article by Barry Hindess which extends the 'production' metaphor. (Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar *Reading Capital* London: Verso, 1970; Barry Hindess 'Models and masks: empiricist

conceptions of the social conditions of scientific knowledge' in *Economy and Society* vol. 2, no. 2, May 1973, pp. 233–254)

- 10 Richard Johnson 'Three Problematics: elements of a theory of working class culture' in Clarke, Critcher and Johnson *Working Class Culture* pp. 80–81. See also Richard Johnson's excellent article 'Histories of Culture/Theories of Ideology' in M. Barrett, P. Corrigan, A. Kuhn, J. Wolff (eds) *Ideology and Cultural Production* London: Croom Helm, 1979
- 11 Burawoy *The Politics of Production* pp. 39

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