

# A Challenge We Cannot Evade

In May 1959 Cabinet set up a committee to inquire into the industrial and general development of the West Coast, including the counties of Buller, Grey, Inangahua, and Westland. The committee of four well known business men had the assistance of official advisers and secretaries; it held its first meeting on 25th June, 1959; it heard submissions from about one hundred organisations, persons, and departments; it tendered its main report mid 1960 and a supplementary report followed in October. The supplementary report, which advocates the establishment of a large-scale milling and integrated forest-products industry, was prepared by the Arthur D. Little Survey Group of U.S.A., sponsored by the Fletcher Holdings Organisation of New Zealand.

It would be unfair not to pay tribute to the amount of work the committee and its advisers have put into the report, which doubtless was prepared and submitted with good faith, but we are quite unable to agree with some of its recommendations. It recommends wholesale milling of both podocarps and beech timbers; it dismisses contemptuously the scenic value of the West Coast; and it makes a direct attack on the integrity of the National Parks Act.

We believe the reports build an unanswerable case for the inclusion on such committees of members whose visions are broader than those limited by the acquisition of money, or alternatively the reports emphasise the need for a Natural Resources Conservation Council with power to investigate and make recommendations on all such development projects.

To the credit of the Arthur D. Little Group, it decided that all milling should be carried out in accordance with the N.Z. Forest Service's rules in order to give it the maximum opportunity to carry out its policy of conservation and utilisation, and it is fair to add also that the committee itself recognised the danger of floods and the need for dealing with the noxious-animals problem; indeed, it could hardly fail to do so after saying on page 11 that "these steep mountains are unsuitable for farming. The tops are bare rock or tussock and the lower slopes are covered with mountain forests containing little millable timber." Again, on page 66, we read, "... the run-off of rainwater from the mountains is enormous and rapid." "Extensive flood protection and river control works need urgent consideration because of frequent recurrence of severe flooding, mostly over rich alluvial flats." This makes it difficult to understand the committee's apparent lack of appreciation of the scenery and its almost contemptuous references to scenic values. For instance, on page 79, "Scenery alone will not prove sufficient to attract many New Zealanders to the area," and on page 35—4c, "Provide entertainment, other than scenic, for travellers."

The committee's reports dealt also with mining of coal and other minerals, with land development and farming, and briefly with the whitebait and tourist industries, and as well included notes on harbours and transport by rail, sea, and air. On these matters the report is useful; its lack of appreciation of the wonderful scenic values of the West Coast is perplexing; its recommendation that the principal industry on the West Coast should be large-scale milling of indigenous timbers is depressing, almost a reversal to one hundred years ago, but its recommendations relating to national parks are calamitous, and if adopted would reduce the National Parks Act and control to a mockery. On page 62 of the report there appears a questionable statement: "National Parks seem to be regarded as sacrosanct." One must assume that it was beyond the comprehension of the members that any areas can contain "natural features so beautiful or unique, or scenery of such distinctive quality that their preservation in perpetuity is in the national interests" (National Parks Act). Preservation in perpetuity means in fact that the areas concerned not only appear to be, but are indeed sacrosanct. The committee's report is critical of the National Parks Authority to set aside wilderness areas. Tramping clubs, alpine clubs and kindred organisations will join with our Society in opposing any attempt to curtail the Authority's power to set aside wilderness areas, which we regard as a very important provision in the Act.