

FOREWORD

"The Philistine with his bulldozer is on the rampage in New Zealand"

I used that sentence years ago when I launched a campaign in the Wellington "Evening Post" against the Tongariro Power Scheme. That sentence still applies.

There is, of course, no hope of stopping the Power Scheme from operating, but the time has come to review what use is being made of the water from the various rivers.

When the Scheme was launched it seemed to me that its taking of the waters of the Wanganui, the Whakapapa, part of the Tongariro and many tributaries in such an arbitrary and greedy way was nothing short of an act of vandalism, ignoring the rights of every New Zealander. The rivers belong to us all and should surely not be controlled by a few bureaucrats.

In questioning the wisdom of the scheme, I soon found that I had the whole weight of officialdom - the Ministry of Works, Engineers and the Electricity Department against me. That in itself was formidable, but soon it became apparent that they had long made up their minds and were in fact so fixed in prejudice that they were determined to get their own way regardless of any damage they might do and regardless of the rights of others.

To start with it was obvious that the true glories of New Zealand, its amazing beauty of forest and river meant nothing to them. They had learned the word "progress" and would apply it to any block of concrete, no matter how expensively useless and fundamentally ugly.

Soon, too, I realised that what little the public was being told was filtered through a screen of twisted facts and juggled figures that amounted at times to downright lies. All sorts of carrots were dangled before us. Taumarunui, for instance, was promised that lots of money and employment would come to it from the scheme, so all objections were withdrawn, but to this day, Taumarunui has seen little of either money or employment.

The main disaster was, and still is, the taking of the water of the rivers. New Zealanders

had always regarded them as their God-given right, but apparently not so - it seems that the rivers belong to the Electricity Department to fiddle with as they wish. This is cunningly smoothed over by piddling payments for the loss of power at a minor power station when too much water is diverted.

It is interesting to see the forces of Government put this forward like a sweet to a child as though it compensated in full for the loss of a glorious river. Incidentally that same river is now disgustingly polluted from the loss of the flow.

I have had a fishing cottage on the Whakapapa river since before the Tongariro scheme was built and throughout the arguments this was held against me. The Minister of Works of the time, claimed that I was arguing for "selfish motives" as though anyone living nearby should have no right to comment - a strangely feudal attitude.

One newspaper said I was against the scheme because my cottage would be "inundated". It was typical that the reporter visiting the cottage in my absence had got it so wrong that he somehow assumed that a river largely depleted of water would "inundate" a cottage on a cliff high above the river. Little wonder that the Ministry of Works could so easily mislead the public.

Of course at the time such a gloomy picture was painted of our supposedly desperate shortage of power that we contemplated using candles and cooking over charcoal. Naturally, there was a tendency to overlook the loss of rivers and to ignore the vast cost of the scheme especially with the figures handily minimised and glossed over. The rednecks revelled in it.

When the scheme was almost completed a public meeting was held in Taumarunui. An engineer from Tokaanu answered questions. It was indeed that his visit came too late for he admitted frankly and openly that taking the Whakapapa had been an "engineering mistake".

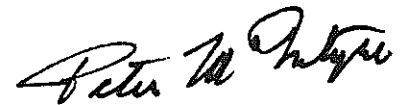
So sadly, as a sacrifice on the altar of progress went one of the most beautiful

rivers in New Zealand and, incidentally, one of the great trout fishing rivers of the world. Today in summer it trickles between vast areas of dry boulders.

I was born in New Zealand as also my Mother was, and even as a small boy learned to love its bush and rivers, to catch trout in its unspoiled streams. Later I spent many happy years painting its scenery. In my old age, I feel deeply sad to see so much of it disappearing. There is always some excuse to destroy a little bit here and a little bit there. The apparently pressing need of the moment makes us forget that we are destroying something that rightly belongs to our children and their grandchildren.

I wonder how long the word of the twenty-third psalm will apply to us in New Zealand - "He maketh me to lie in pastures green - he leadeth me the quiet waters by".

Keith Chapple is not asking for the hydro scheme to be scrapped. He is asking the Government to look again at the use and distribution of the water. With less urgent demand for power it surely is not much to ask if New Zealand can have its rivers to some extent restored. It would be a superb restoration of faith in our national heritage at very little cost to all.



Peter McIntyre.