

FORESTRY WORKERS: CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

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Summary

The paper describes the conditions of service of manual workers in the Forestry Commission. It does not deal with employment in private forestry. Mention is made of the total number of industrial workers employed by the Commission and how and why the labour force has dropped over the past few years. The question of redundancy is touched upon. Reference is made to the age imbalance amongst the Forestry Commission's industrial staff and to the implications of establishment. The composition and functions of the Forestry Commission Industrial and Trade Council, pay, hours of work, overtime, piecework, time lost due to bad weather, annual leave and holidays with pay, special leave with pay, payment of wages during sickness, and travelling are also covered.

1. This paper is concerned with the conditions of service of the manual workers employed by the Forestry Commission. The conditions of service of forestry workers employed on the estates of private landowners are not the concern of the Commission.

2. The Forestry Commission at present employs about 6,900 manual workers (more usually termed "industrial" workers) in its forests, depots, workshops etc. In addition there are some 2,480 non-industrial staff, such as foresters, district officers, Conservancy and Headquarters staff. The number of industrials employed by the Commission has been steadily dropping over the past few years because of increased mechanisation and new and improved management techniques. The highest total of workers in the Commission's employ was 13,620 in 1954; the total had dropped to 10,850 by 1965 and, as stated above, had fallen to about 6,900 by the middle of 1971. Most of the reduction has been achieved by what we call "natural wastage" (that is by the non-replacement of men who retire or move of their own volition to other jobs etc.) but just over 300 workers have had to be discharged on grounds of redundancy since 1965. The discharge of workers because of redundancy, even when on a small scale, is always an unpleasant task, of course, and tends to cause a souring of labour relations at any forest at which it takes place. The Commission has a redundancy procedure agreed with the Trade Unions which follows the general principle of "last in—first out", an equitable system from the

point of view of the workers but one which does not always allow the Commission to retain its most efficient employees. With the exception of those with less than two years' continuous service, workers who are discharged on redundancy receive a compensatory payment which varies according to their length of service and their age.

3. As a result of the rundown in the labour force the Commission is faced with the problem of an age imbalance amongst its industrial staff, over 60% of whom are now aged over 40. Corrective action in the form of higher recruitment of young men will not be possible, however, until such time as the size of the labour force stabilises and the Commission can start recruiting workers again on a reasonable scale.

4. About one-third of the Commission's industrial employees are "established", that is they have been accepted as permanent staff who will normally be expected to stay with the Commission until 60, at which age they will be entitled to retire with an annual pension and a single lump sum retirement gratuity. The pension is calculated at the rate of one eightieth of the employee's average pay at plain time rates over the last 3 years for each completed year of reckonable service (subject to a maximum of forty eightieths by age 60 and forty-five eightieths by age 65) and the lump sum payment is equal to three times the amount of the annual pension. Pensions are reviewed every two years and adjusted as necessary to take account of their loss in value due to inflation. Although the minimum age of retirement is 60, most of the Commission's industrial staff are allowed to extend their service until age 65 subject to their continuing to remain fit and efficient. In return for established status, workers are required to accept an obligation to work wherever the Forestry Commission directs them to, but in practice this has only ever been invoked by the Commission in redundancy situations.

(New rules have been introduced since this was written, in accordance with which an established worker can only be required to move permanently to another place of work if it is within reasonable travelling distance of his home).

5. The majority of the Commission's workers are unestablished, i.e. they are not permanent members of the staff and do not receive a pension on retirement. They do, however, receive a gratuity payment if they leave the Commission's employ, for any reason other than a disciplinary offence,

after not less than five years' service. This is calculated at the rate of one week's pay at plain time rate for each year of reckonable service up to 5 years, two weeks' pay for each of the next 5 years and four weeks' pay for each year of reckonable service over 10 years, subject to a total of one year's pay.

6. Except for purely local matters which are the subject of negotiation between foresters and workers (such as the time and the place men should report for work each day, piecework rates, etc) conditions of service are negotiated nationally on the Forestry Commission Industrial and Trade Council and are common to all workers throughout Great Britain. The Industrial and Trade Council consists of seven officials from the Forestry Commission and one from the Department of Employment, making up the "Official Side", and three representatives from each of the three constituent Trade Unions making up the "Trade Union Side". The Trade Unions represented on the Council are the National Union of Agricultural and Allied Workers, the National Union of General and Municipal Workers and the Transport and General Workers Union. Some of the more important conditions of service agreed by the Council are briefly summarised in the following paragraphs. Those indicated with an asterisk (*) are the same as those applying in the industrial Civil Service as a whole.

Pay

7. Just over 80% of the Commission's industrial staff have their pay negotiated on the Industrial and Trade Council. The staff concerned (generally known as forest workers) are those who are in the main doing jobs solely connected with forestry operations, such as felling, extraction, etc. The remaining 20%, who are employed on work more often associated with a larger industry outside, follow the rates of pay laid down for that industry (e.g. the Commission's road construction workers have their pay based upon the rates laid down for the Civil Engineering industry). In this way the Council ensures that their pay keeps in line with the generally accepted rates for the job. The basic weekly wage of an adult male forest worker, as agreed on the Council is currently £15.13. Juveniles (those under 20) and females receive set percentages of this rate. Progress is being made towards equal pay for female workers in accordance with the Equal Pay Act 1970 which comes into force at the end of 1975. Additions to the basic weekly wage are granted for skills: these additions (generally known as "leads") range from £0.27 to £1.60. Most workers are able to increase their earnings by means of piece-

work or overtime, however, and the average weekly earnings of the Commission's industrial staff for the financial year 1970/71, during the greater part of which the basic pay stood at £13.48, was £19.80. During holidays and annual leave a worker is restricted to his plain time pay (i.e. his basic pay plus lead, if any). Pension and gratuity entitlements and sick pay are also based upon pay at plain time rates.

Hours of Work

8. Forest workers are at present conditioned to a 40 hour week (Monday to Friday) exclusive of meal times and overtime. Workers whose pay is linked to outside trade rates follow the weekly hours laid down for the industry concerned—these are all set at 40 hours at present.

Overtime

9. Forest workers receive the following rates of pay for work done in excess of their agreed daily working hours:

Monday to Friday	—First two hours at time-and-a-third; thereafter at time-and-a-half.
Saturday (before 1400 hours)	—as above.
(after 1400 hours)	—Time-and-a-half.
Sunday	—Double time.

Special rules apply for work done on public holidays (e.g. Christmas Day) and privilege holidays (i.e. extra holidays granted to Civil Servants in addition to the normal public holidays).

Overtime rates for "trade-rated" employees vary according to the industry concerned.

Piecework

10. It has been agreed on the Council that when piecework is desirable, piecework rates and any subsequent changes in those rates shall be agreed locally. It has also been agreed that the piecework rates for any job shall be such that a Skilled Forest Worker (that is a worker whose time pay consists at present of £15.13 basic pay plus a lead of £0.55) is able to earn on piecework in the ordinary weekly hours not less than 30% above his normal time rate for the period he is employed on piecework.

Time Lost due to Bad Weather

11. Workers who attend for work but are prevented from working on account of bad weather are paid at plain time rate for the time they are idle, except that pieceworkers receive no payment

for any idle period of less than two hours aggregated over a day.

Annual Leave and Holidays with Pay

12. Full-time employees are allowed 3 weeks' annual leave with pay at plain time rate. Part-time employees are allowed annual leave on a proportionate basis. In addition to annual leave a further $8\frac{1}{2}$ days are granted as holidays with pay (e.g. Christmas Day).

Special Leave with Pay

13. Employees may be allowed special leave with pay at plain time rate in certain circumstances (e.g. on marriage, for the purpose of public work, etc.). Applications for time off without pay are also considered for good and genuine reasons.

Payment of Wages during Sickness

14. Employees who work regularly for the Commission for not less than 18 hours a week and who have completed 26 weeks' reckonable service may receive full pay based upon their normal

plain time rate, less any National Insurance sickness or injury benefits to which they may be entitled, for sick or injury absences, up to a total of 13 weeks in any period of 12 months' reckonable service. After five years' reckonable service an employee who has exhausted his entitlement to sick leave on full pay may be granted a further period of up to 13 weeks on half pay. Sick leave (paid or unpaid) may not exceed a total of 52 weeks in any period of four years or less. The qualifying period of 26 weeks' service referred to above is waived in the case of an employee who is absent as a result of suffering an injury during the normal course of his employment.

Travelling

15. It is the employee's responsibility to get to and from the official reporting point at his home forest in his own time and at his own expense. If this reporting point is varied by the forester assistance towards extra travelling costs may be granted in certain circumstances. Where an employee is authorised to use his private vehicle on official business, a mileage allowance is payable.