

EDITORIAL

EMPLOYMENT IN THE FORESTRY SECTOR

Current events in state companies, relating particularly to surplus employees and laying off, or as today's coin word is "providing for", show that the forestry sector has about 2000 employees who should be "provided for". It is an interesting phenomenon: in all state companies the surplus employee problem is solved by employee retirement, early retirement or severance pay. One may think that the main objective of the Government is not to reduce unemployment but achieve a 1:1 ratio between the employed and the retired (despite the fact that the ratio is unfavourable, largely owing to a large number of retired people who have not earned their pension from work, at least not from the retirement fund). Financial means are available for severance pays but not for incentives and creating new jobs for surplus employees. The real issue is this: either the management is not interested or not capable of finding new jobs, or there is a third reason, unknown to us. In terms of surplus employees in forestry, we naturally mean the company Hrvatske Šume Ltd, since this company manages over 90% of the forest area in Croatia, the site of almost all forest production.

Before the Home War, the forestry sector employed about 16,000 people and had positive business. Today, there are 8.500 employees, while nominally, there should be 6,000 employees. It would be interesting to analyze the calculation for the above number of employees. We have urged the authorities on several occasions to analyze the current condition by focusing primarily on the jobs needed to maintain the principle of sustainable management and determining on the optimal number and expertise of those needed to accomplish the set tasks. In fact, the owner (the State) should, through its competent Ministry, prescribe and strictly control the fulfilment of the tasks based on mid-term forestry strategy. It should also identify whether a company responsible for management is capable of performing all the needed tasks, or whether it will, striving for profit, either conduct the jobs negligently or even worse, completely omit some activities necessary for the forest, constantly postponing them for "better times", without considering negative long-term consequences. The owner should, in accordance with the general economic strategy, insist on a comprehensive, rational and acceptable use of forest goods. This would generate a different approach to a rational, market based use of classical forest products, biomass and non-market forest values as a renewable natural resource. Forests are a

renewable natural resource, but in certain areas they can also become non-renewable. For example, if a forest is not regenerated after a fire, erosion will set in and the forest soil will disappear. Forests can also become non-renewable in places where intensive irrigation activities cause a drop in groundwater levels, consequently leading to forest dieback.

What has changed in forestry that workforce has dropped below 40% of the pre-war employee number? Work technologies? Maybe, but not drastically: chain saws were also used before the war and assortments were hauled from forests with tractors, cable cars and forwarders. The changes that have taken place relate mainly to increased security and protection at work, which does not implicate a lower number of workers. Even if there were major changes, they would relate primarily to physical workers. What about engineers and technicians? For several years now, engineers have not been employed permanently but temporarily and on various contracts. According to the latest governmental decision, all of them will lose their jobs. If we remember correctly, the natural outflow of highly educated forestry staff is about 40 a year, which equals the number of newly graduated forestry engineers. Today's sophisticated jobs that have replaced classical physical labour in the past should, logically, open more vacancies for forestry technicians.

The editorials of the Forestry Journal, the scientific and professional forestry paper, aim to encourage thinking and taking stands on current affairs, but also seeking solutions to current events. Not only has the term forestry "disappeared" from the name of the competent ministry, but it also seems that forestry has become "the last hole on the flute", an old term meaning that is has the lowest and the most neglected position, in the state. Not even the employees, let alone the forestry profession outside this system, have any idea of what is happening in the company Hrvatske Šume Ltd. Has it always been like this, or have important changes in forestry been discussed democratically, or sometimes undemocratically, at the level of the profession? Do we have the right to know that is going on in the Ministry and in Hrvatske Šume Ltd? Yes, we do, because every owner has the right to know that is happening with its ownership. The State is the owner of the forest as the good of general benefit only formally, while the real owner is all of us, unless some of those who have been entrusted with the management of our ownership believe that "The State, It is I".

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