

- Current involvement in the Rural Youth Movement is around 70% men – 30% women. This is part of the reason men hold most leadership positions.
  - Enthusiasm is important to gaining leadership roles.
  - A positive role is for the wife to act as farm secretary
  - Women leave the Rural Youth Movement for two reasons-
    - (a) Women mature more rapidly than men
    - (b) The organization does not cater for married women.
- The session then closed.

### “RURAL FUTURES – GET THE DRIFT”

Dr. Fred Emery

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National Convention 1979, Australian Council of Rural Youth.

Fred said that he wanted to cover five major sets of items.

He then began by saying that in order to look at the future you need to look at where you are actually “at”. Without that information then you won’t get any useful discussion about where you might be going to.

Fred then went on to look at a range of facts about some aspects of the future. In particular he focused on the questions of “The drift to the cities”. He made the following points –

- In 1972-73 people were focusing on the problems on growing cities. At that stage the issue of the death of the rural areas was lost. No one was worried.
- Fred then spent a considerable time talking about research he had undertaken previously. The research had taken into account the capacity of the car and our road network to move people quickly over long distances. As a result of the research they came up with the proposal that –
  - People who live within a fifty mile distance of a town of five thousand people or more could have a life style equal to city people (only a very small number of rural families did not live in such a situation).
  - In each state the research showed that there were 3-4 towns that had 2,000-3,000 people living there. It seemed appropriate to attempt to raise the population of these places to 5,000 as this seemed to provide the basic choices necessary. Unfortunately the Government did not adopt such a proposal. They were looking to develop major rural cities, e.g. Wodonga or Bathurst.
  - Having updated the research using the 1976 census figures, Fred found that 21 of the towns across Australia which had had 2,000 – 3,000 population had grown. This had occurred without Government encouragement.
  - In 1950’s and 1960’s if you put one person on the land they would generate one job.

- Now if you put one person on the land that generates 2-5 jobs in town.

This is the way to get people back into the country. It is far more effective than trying to get industry to decentralize.

Earlier in the Convention there had been some discussion about people being interested in moving out of the city to the country, Fred was able to provide the following information about the possibility. He said that from his figures this was not a possibility, it was something that had already happened. He then provided a range of figures to support this. The figures showed that –

- In the late sixties the inner suburban areas could be classified as a lower class or working areas, had suffered a significant decline in population density.
- In the early seventies, suburbs which could be classified as middle to upper class had suffered major population density declines (major means in the hundreds of thousands of people).

Fred then went on to show that the people had been making specific choices about their new locations. In the country coastal area of New South Wales there has been a growth of 20% in population in the last census period. Sydney has suffered a decline of 5% and the rest of the State a growth at approximately 2%. People in Australia as well as overseas are moving into the “Sun Surf” belt.

This is a major change which no one was seriously predicting in the early 70’s. Such a process leads to a very rapid change in the culture of a rural society.

The research also showed that people into the country have high education, skills and a lot of wealth.

This movement of people into rural areas also generates the creation of hamlets. These hamlets are different to those of olden days in that they are satellites of larger towns and as such are able, between them, to provide the services necessary to maintain a reasonable level of lifestyle.

Fred then said that the participants need to explore the consequence of this cultural change for themselves. The process of increasing urbanization has been going on for 200 years. We have no experience in dealing with the reverse.

In the next section of the session, Fred made a number of points about our social and economic system. They were\_

- We are now in an economic crisis. The question we need to answer is whether it will go away like other crises we have experienced.
- In the time since we have had figures on the world economy, it has had periods of massive growth broken up by recessions. The recessions have come about every 40-50 years. The recession we are in now is right where it should be.

In diagram form the situation looks like-



- The pattern is that the economies come into these recessions at a fast growth rate. They then –
- Flatten out
  - Jump up again (the Indian Summer)
  - Dive into a trough
  - Begin to grow and eventually come out of recession into another period of rapid growth.
- If you look at our current situation it is very similar. Individual manufacturing industries go through the sequence exactly. We can expect that Health, Education and Welfare services will also go through the sequence.
  - The problems of our current economic recession will be complicated by the move out of urban lifestyles.
  - These periods of economic recession have been characterized by periods of great conflict. The conflict usually occurs in two areas-
    - (a) Over work values. The workers v industrialists.
    - (b) Over ideas. (In good times ideas do not inspire the normal man much at all).

Fred suggested that for us the ideas which will generate conflict are:-

- Conservation
- Zero Population Growth
- Non Growth Economics

As a result of previous recessions people have demanded, and shortly after received, greater rights in the society. For us this will probably take the form of participating rather than representative democracy.

Fred then pointed out that this is the fourth recession in the sequence. There is a chance that it will be the last and we will not move into another period of rapid economic growth. This is a real possibility because all previous periods of growth have been propelled by a cheap energy source.

Fred suggested that we may have consumed our energy base. We are no longer able to add to our potential energy resources rapidly enough to cope with a further period of economic growth.

If this is so, what will the consequence be for our future lifestyle?

“We will have to move to shorten the energy chain between what is produced and the market.” This will involve looking at all steps necessary to produce and market an item. The longer it is the more energy it uses at every part.

Unlike all previous periods of recession, this time around we are suffering stagflation (unemployment and inflation). The reason for this is that energy costs more no matter what you do.

We will move from there being 6% of the population in rural industries to the point where 15% is involved by the year 2000. They will be involved in specialized agriculture and locally specialized markets. This will also be creating the higher multiplier effect of 3 in town for 1 on the land.

Fred then opened the session up for questions.

Q. I am getting involved with the use of alcohol fuels. What sort of impacts do you see this having in Australia?

- In the short term it can have a significant impact, partly because it does not involve a lot of capital input.

Q. You base your assumptions on society using one fuel up and then finding another. What contributions has nuclear power to play?

- Relatively little because it is so energy intensive itself. Up until now each new energy source has been cleaner and more effective. This is not so with nuclear.

Q. Could you outline the effect of the move back to rural living, what you see for the future on the world's economy.

- (a) The end of energy propelled industries
- (b) The emergence of knowledge will be sustained (energy x knowledge = material transformation)
- (c) Dispersed living structures – move away from large centralized structures.
- (d) New ways of governing ourselves.

Q. We are now considering the side effects of our fuel sources. We not only look at the direct economic effect but also at the environmental impacts as well. Would you comment on this change?

- Rather than respond to the question Fred threw the discussion open to everyone. The following points were made-

- There was general discussion about the costs involved in creating energy supplies and service networks.

A participant then ask everyone-

- If there is no energy supplies then that means the end of our civilization, then what are we doing sitting here?

-Fred responded by saying that the question is probably unanswerable. He then posed the question-

#### STANDARD VS QUALITY OF LIFE

- Several speakers also made the point that the input of the entire Convention should provoke each of us to review our own lifestyle and expectations.
- An individual then asked Fred if he saw value in solar energy and the conversation of water into hydrogen?
- Fred responded by saying as an individual alternative and in small scale usage, but as macro alternatives, no, not really.

The two final comments were-

- The energy crisis is going to have a significant impact on the operation of the rural Youth Movement. This is something that we will all need to think about.
- If the future is to be a worthwhile thing then there will need to be a fundamental change in our attitudes to our fellow man.

The session and the Convention then closed.