

'Tree-snatchers' active in Britain

By M. McINTYRE HOID
LONDON — Five hundred forests throughout the United Kingdom have been patrolled nightly for the last month by men hoping to ambush the "tree-snatchers" — gangs of highly organized thieves who steal young fir saplings to be sold as Christmas trees. These patrols are organized by the Forestry Commission, for which the cutting and selling of Christmas trees is big business.

This year, the Commission has cut and sold over 500,000 saplings for the Christmas market. It sells only trees or cuttings taken in thinning-out work — but the thieves plunder plantations indiscriminately.

BIG-SCALE THEFTS

The tree-snatchers work in plantations which are conveniently located at the big cities. They use large trucks carrying five or six men. In a night's work, they can steal 500 or more trees, to be sold openly on the wholesale markets at prices ranging from \$1 to \$1.50 each.

A favorite haunt of the tree thieves is the New Forest, in Hampshire, where there are large plantations. This year the night patrols were stepped up, and some of the patrols were equipped with walk-talkie two-way radio sets. Trained dogs were also used to track down the raiders.

"He'll be a very clever thief who gets away with a tree this year," said Forestry Commission executive officer Walter Watson.

SEVERE BIG TREES

The big Christmas tree demand means a lot of extra work for the raiders.

"We specialize in selling trees 30 and 40 feet high to local authorities or large firms all

over the country. This has been a good year for growth, and the trees were in excellent condition."

But the small family trees are as popular as ever, and hundreds of truck loads have left the New Forest during the last few weeks.

Last year, the Forestry Commission earned close to \$300,000 from its sales of Christmas trees. But a few raids on one of its big estates — it owns 35,000 acres in the New Forest alone — can prove very expensive because of the damage done by thieves in addition to the trees stolen.

Buckinghamshire, which has large areas of forest within easy reach of London, has been one of the happy hunting grounds for tree thieves. Because of the extra patrol precautions taken, however, the raids have been much less numerous this year than in some of the past years.

A spokesman for the Buckinghamshire police said:

"These men come from London with their trucks. They call them lorries in this country — and can clear hundreds of trees in one night. What makes it so profitable for them is that they can sell the trees in the open market. No one can say where the trees came from, so the thieves get the same price as honest dealers."



French Deny Weston Given Invitation

PARIS (Reuters) — President de Gaulle's office has issued a note denying London press reports that one of the president's staff had encouraged Canadian Garfield Weston to move into the French market.

The note said: "A British newspaper, this morning attributed to Mr. Weston, head of Associated British Foods, remarks which have been reproduced by certain French newspapers."

Mr. Weston has said to have indicated that he had been in touch with an aid of the president about taking part in a French business.

"It is pointed out, from a good source, that nobody at the president's office has ever had direct or indirect contacts on this subject, which are private matters, nor any other subject."

The Evening newspaper

has said that Weston had told shareholders at a company meeting he had been encouraged by a member of de Gaulle's staff to open shops in France and help beat the "meat combine."

The newspaper says he was preparing to buy a chain of shops in France and that the agreement would be signed Friday.

"With respect to pregnant women, the question is really one of availability for employment," said the report. It recommended that women whose employment terminates because of pregnancy be considered unavailable for employment until eight weeks after confinement. If employment ceases "for any other reason," a pregnant woman should be considered unavailable for work for eight weeks before and eight weeks after confinement.

WOMEN POSE PROBLEM

By reason of their ability to work or not work as they choose, some married women

Gill Report Notes Abuses In Unemployment Insurance

OTTAWA (CP) — The Gill committee on unemployment insurance recommended steps to help eliminate abuses of the insurance program by married women.

At the same time, it made clear that women are not the only ones guilty of abusing the plan.

Accordingly, the committee in its report tabled in the Commons said it was not satisfied that regulations should be established applying "special conditions" to one class of insured persons.

Instead it recommended changes in respect to qualifying conditions and maximum duration of benefit aimed at eliminating abuses arising from claims by intermittently employed persons or workers who have in fact withdrawn from the labor market.

The report recommended stricter claims supervision and more vigorous follow-up of cases where referrals to job opportunities have been made without successful placement.

At present, pregnant women are considered unavailable for employment for six weeks before and six weeks after confinement. The committee also recommended that married women with pre-school children be considered ineligible for employment unless they can prove to the satisfaction of the Unemployment Insurance Commission that they have made adequate arrangements for care of the children.

The committee noted that many women withdraw from employment at marriage or shortly afterward. "In so withdrawing some may file claim for and draw benefit as long as

they are able to do so. . . . benefits "although their ability for employment is tremendously doubtful."

Furthermore, women whose employment has terminated because of pregnancy often draw

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