



**Competition, conflict, and
cooperation:
an ethnographic analysis of an
Australian forest industry dispute**

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an anthropological analysis of an industrial dispute that occurred within the East Gippsland forest industry. The dissertation brings an ethnographic focus to local political developments that took place in 1997 and early 1998. From this analysis, it emerges that the aforementioned dispute was not an anomaly or an aberration but the result of prevailing class relationships.

My research found these class relationships to have been generated by changes to the international division of labour within the pulp and paper industries over the last forty years. The effect of these international-level changes has been to tether hinterlands like East Gippsland ever more tightly to supra-local economic and political imperatives. Principally, these imperatives have been the international woodchip trade and the burgeoning political influence of the environmental lobby. In recent decades, the movements of capital have become increasingly elusive and the political potency of environmentalism ever stronger. East Gippsland is a region through which the interests of both the timber industries and environmental groups are keenly pursued. The residents of East Gippsland have found themselves vulnerable to these contingencies repeatedly.

Beneath these national and international economic and political machinations, at the base of the forest industry, are the loggers and carters who inspired this dissertation. This sector is continually subject to the downward pressure of capitalist woodchipping interests, government regulation and environmental activism, and the sawmillers who are the immediate employers of loggers and carters. My dissertation is an analysis of how these workers strove to achieve better working conditions for themselves, and to share in the wealth that they created. In doing so, a distinctive regional class interest was exercised to achieve significant political results.

DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

David Raftery

Date 3.10.1.00

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