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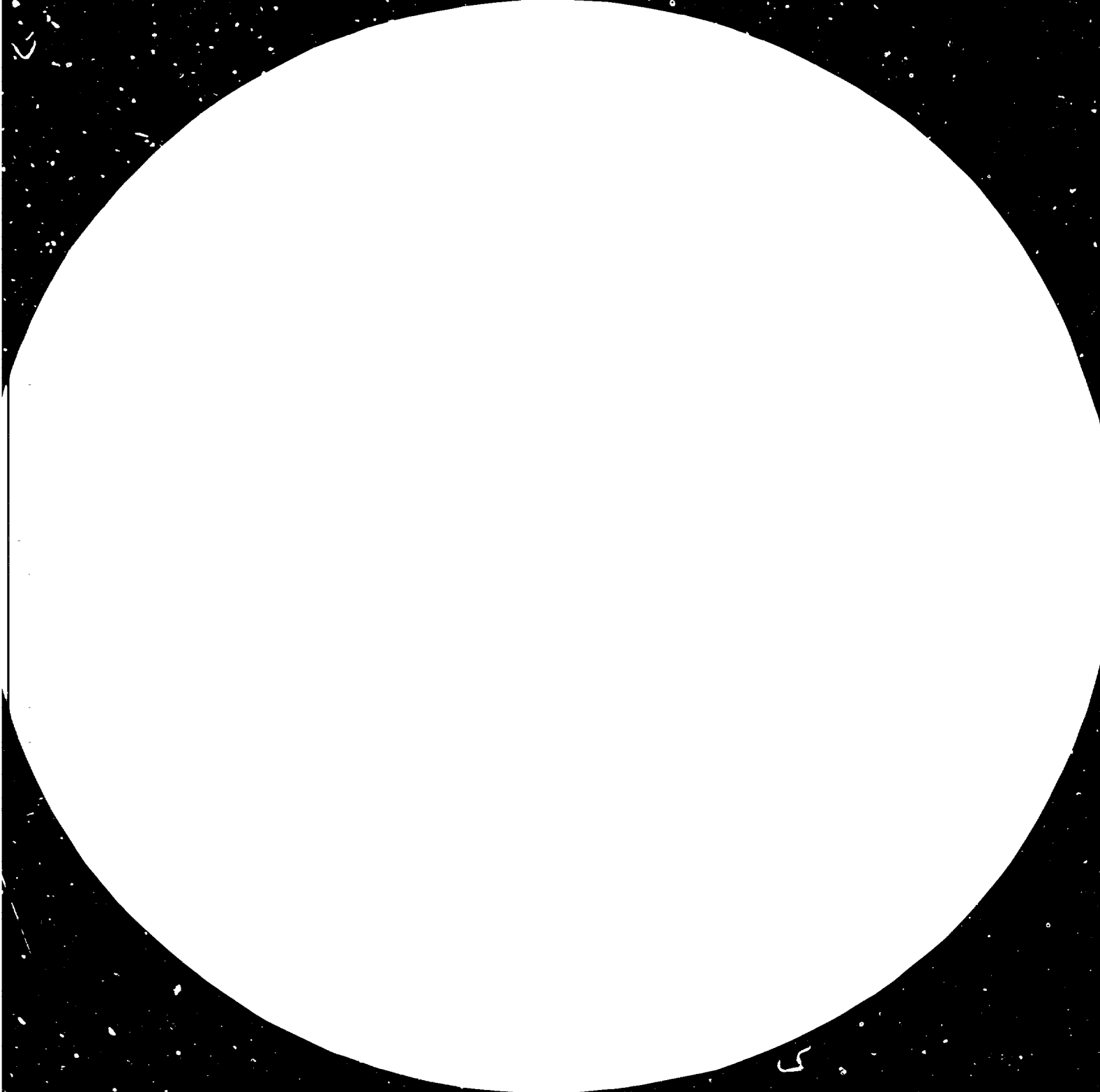
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Seminar on the Furniture and Joinery Industries,  
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THE FURNITURE AND JOINERY INDUSTRIES IN BURMA \*

by

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## 1. Introduction

The Furniture Factory was originally created as a unit researching the utility properties of Burma's hardwoods under the Burma Forest Department. It was making sample furniture to test the decorativeness and joinery properties of the various hardwoods available in the country since 1920. This particular timber research unit was under the supervision of a Senior Forest Officer. It was handed over to the Agricultural and Rural Development Corporation (A.R.D.C.) in the year 1954 under the name of Forest Industries Department. It produced custom made furniture and doors and window frames to order. It was a sub-corporation running on a commercial basis.

In 1962, the Timber Corporation took over the Forest Industries Department. The name of the Industry was changed to The Furniture Factory. It produces furniture and joinery according to the prescribed designs in batch production and no longer to order. At present, it produces doors and window frames, ready to use furniture and furniture components and teak flooring strips such as parquet and mosaic and some novelties as well. Various types of popular hardwoods of Burma, including teak, are employed.

## 2. The Industry

The annual sustained yield of commercial hardwood from Burma's forests is around two million cubic metres of which about ten species are commercially popular furniture timbers, constituting some fifty per cent of the total volume. The present annual consumption of furniture timber is around three thousand cubic metres and six thousand square metres of plywood and the value of the annual output of the Furniture Factory is about US dollars 1.47 million. But the value of the annual demand of furniture in the country is about US dollars 3.5 million.

It can be clearly seen that the Furniture Factory can only produce very much less than the country's demand. So, it hardly caters even to the needs of the Government Departments, Co-operatives and Schools. Besides, foreign enquiries for the products of the Furniture Factory have persistantly been growing day by day. Export of some items it produced since the early seventies is growing. There is ample room for expansion of the industry, which is one of the country's priorities.

### 2.1 Existing Furniture Industry

The woodworking machines used in the existing factory have been bought some twenty years ago mostly from the United Kingdom. Since then, there have been large improvements. Many of our machines are too old to maintain the required accuracy and good finishing properties. Moreover we are short of spares and cutting tools have therefore been substituted with locally made ones which are not efficient and cannot maintain the standard of quality and quantity desired. The machine and equipment as well as spare parts should be replaced by modern ones as soon as possible.

All wood working machines produce a large quantity of waste in the form of sawdust, wood chips, shavings, etc. To clean them by manual labour is expensive and retards production; it is also a health hazard. We cannot install a complete dust extraction unit. Internal transportation within the factory is also slow and there is much room for improvement. It should be replaced by modernized equipment.

### 2.2 Manufacturing Methods

As we are manufacturing a large variety of products, all kinds of furniture, doors and windows, etc., we can only adopt batch production methods. Due to the type and condition of machines and the lack of skill of machine operators, we have to employ large numbers of carpenters, who are engaged in making pieces of furniture from start to finish manually. If we are to

catch up with the progress in the industry, we should switch on to assembly line systems as soon as conditions permit us to do so.

### 2.3 Designing and Quality Control

To enable our factories to compete with products on the foreign market, the design must be up to date and acceptable to the buyers. Quality must also be high. To do this we should start by setting up a Research and Development Section with skilled and qualified staff and suitable machines and equipment. It should be independent of production jobs. Once the design and quality have been established, it can be passed on for serial production.

To solve the above problems effectively economically and to suit our conditions, two requirements should be fulfilled: they are capital investment and technical know-how. There are two methods of getting technical know-how: the first is by sending suitable persons for training abroad in specialized training institutions (and not only study tours); the second method is by inviting technicians to Burma for the on-the-job training of personnel.

### 2.4 Demand of Furniture Products

As mentioned above the demand for furniture products has been very high. With the growth in population and the expansion of national schemes, the demand for furniture products is rising. The full capacity production of the existing Furniture Factory is far below the national demand. Burma also needs to export modern furniture using Burmese favourite timber as raw materials. It is therefore considered high time to expand production of domestic and export furniture in Burma in time and in line with the rising demand for such products all over the world.

All these factors combined, call for the need for replacement of machines, extension of plant and construction of new factories. These will consist of resawing plants, seasoning and



moulding plants, an assembly factory and a finishing department. The alternative processes in modern furniture manufacture still needs further study. Technical assistance is necessary in modern furniture production, and it is important to make high quality furniture out of local raw materials including less popular timber species.

### 3. Conclusion

Modern timber trade practices have greatly changed from the early sixties. The sale of logs for furniture and veneer making has been popular in the last 20 years. The demand for lumber is enormous but the supply is limited. At present, there are very few countries which export logs. People began to question the availability of required timber for their industries. Furniture design and the thickness of veneer changed to more effective use of timber available. The timber producing countries, even if sustained yield policies are applied, began to question the assured continuity of their timber natural resources and were alarmed by the need to introduce forest replantations to conserve their forests. The utility side of the timber industries must do more research on more economical ways to use the timber. This is not a problem of a particular country but of all the countries. Saving timber benefits all mankind.

So, it is high time to economize the use of timber by using it in more effective ways. To do that, only finished and semifinished timber products should be exported. To do that modern machines should be employed with supervisors and machine operators who are well trained for the job. The skill of the labourers should be improved by training as part of the job they are expected to do.



