

EDITORIAL

Privatisation

Over the years the State has created a substantial national forest resource, funded largely by an older generation, in the expectation that someday it would become a national asset. The objective was to ensure the maximum benefit to the nation in wealth creation. The forest estate created is the product of investment in time as well as in financial resources and as such has carried with it a substantial element of risk.

The recent bid by private enterprises for State forests suggests an attempt to jump aboard the bandwagon when the risk has diminished and the pay-off is closer. Yet, before we condemn this approach by the private sector, we should think long and hard about the implications. The State sector is at present undercapitalised, while the financial institutions have ample capital for investment. Is there any way in which this capital can be drawn into forestry? A substantial injection of capital into the afforestation programme at this time would be a real shot in the arm for the whole forestry profession in the country. It would bring back the exhilaration of the 1950's and 60's when foresters were faced with new worlds to conquer and fresh challenges were their daily diet. It would create employment and most of all it would utilise much waste land as an investment for the nation. This willingness by the private sector to participate in forestry must be judged in relation to the objectives of wealth creation for the people of Ireland.

The boundary for the individual between making a compulsory investment in forestry through taxation and a voluntary investment through pension funds is perhaps tenuous. Is it possible then to forge some kind of partnership between the State and private sectors in which each will make a contribution to the generation of increased investment for the nation? The matter is worthy of serious consideration by foresters.